CARMELITE MONASTERY
GUNHILL ROAD, BRONX, N.Y.

GARRISON MONASTERY
GARRISON ROAD, BROOKLYN, N.Y.

AN APOSTLE OF THE LEPERS

BY REV. JOHN CARR, C.SS.R.

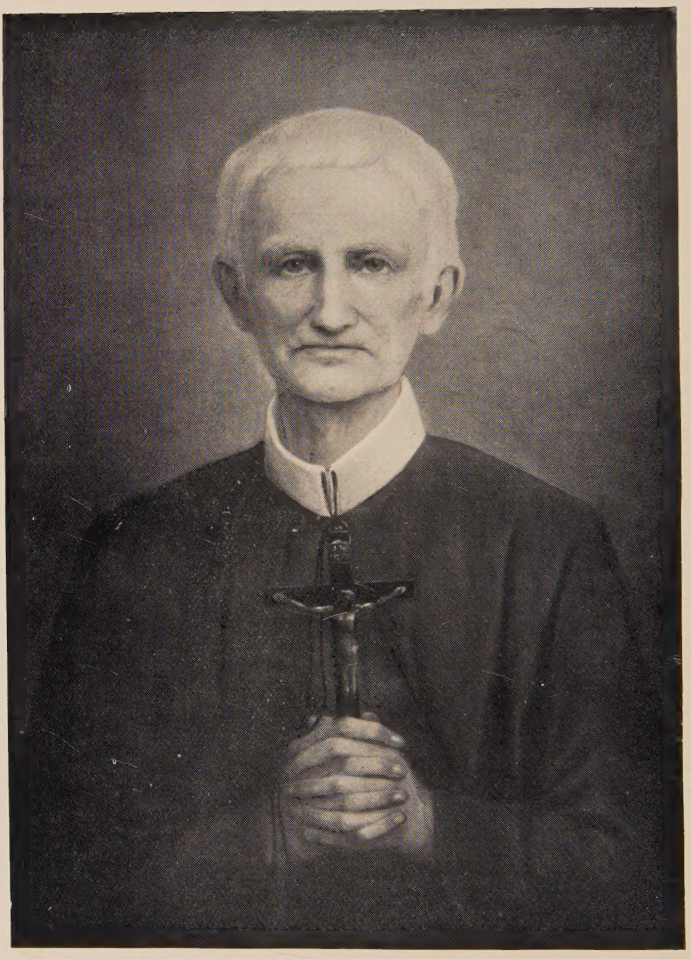
TERESA OF LISIEUX: TRULY A LOVER

CHRIST IS ALL

THE VENERABLE JOSEPH PASSERAT, C.SS.R.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024

https://archive.org/details/apostleoflepersv0000john



THE VENERABLE PETER DONDERS, C.SS.R.
(1809–1887)

AN APOSTLE OF THE LEPERS

THE VEN. PETER DONDERS, C.SS.R.
(1809-1887)

BY

JOHN BAPTIST KRONENBURG, C.SS.R.

Translated from the French Version of
Léon Roelandts, C.SS.R.
by
JOHN CARR, C.SS.R.

WITH MAP AND ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON AND EDINBURGH
SANDS & COMPANY
1930

B
D

Nihil Obstat

CAROLUS SALOTTI,
S. Cons. Adv., et S. R. Congr. Adsessor

ROMAE,
die 9a Novembris, 1924

Imprimatur

JOANNES FITZGERALD, C.SS.R.,
Sup. Prov.

ESKER, ATHENRY,
die 2a Octobris, 1929

Nihil Obstat

ERICUS MACFHINN, S.T.D.,
Censor Deputatus.

Imprimatur

✠JOANNES,
Epūs Clonfertensis.

LOUGHREAE,
die 7a Martii, 1930.

MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN

DECLARATION

In conformity with the Decree of Pope Urban VIII, the Author wishes to declare that in the following pages the words "saint" and "miracle" are employed in a purely human sense, and without any intention whatever of anticipating the judgment of the Church.

TO HIS EMINENCE

CARDINAL VAN ROSSUM, C.SS.R.,

PREFECT OF THE SACRED CONGREGATION OF PROPAGANDA

THIS ENGLISH VERSION OF THE LIFE

OF

A GREAT FOREIGN MISSIONARY

AND

HIS VENERABLE COUNTRYMAN AND CONFRÈRE

IS WITH PERMISSION HUMBLY DEDICATED

BY

THE TRANSLATOR

CONTENTS

		PAGE
	AUTHOR'S PREFACE	XI
	TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE	XV
CHAP.		
I.	THE POOR YOUNG WEAVER—1809-1831	1
II.	SERVANT-BOY AND STUDENT—1831-1837	18
III.	IN THE SEMINARY OF HERLAAR—1837-1841	29
IV.	LAST YEAR IN HOLLAND—1841-1842	40
V.	A PRIEST IN PARAMARIBO—1842-1856	50
VI.	VISITING THE PLANTATIONS—1843-1856	79
VII.	BATAVIA: THE APOSTLE OF THE LEPERS—1856-1866	91
VIII.	THE REDEMPTORIST NOVICE—1866-1867	108
IX.	THE MAN AND THE SAINT	118
X.	BACK IN BATAVIA: THE RELIGIOUS—1867-1883	131
XI.	BACK IN BATAVIA: THE APOSTLE OF THE LEPERS AGAIN—1867-1883	154
XII.	AMONGST THE INDIANS—1868-1886	175
XIII.	IN QUEST OF THE NEGROES—1869-1886	228
XIV.	THE PLANTATIONS AGAIN—1868-1886	236
XV.	IN PARAMARIBO AND CORONIE—1883-1885	243
XVI.	LAST LABOURS AND SUFFERINGS—1885-1887	259
XVII.	DAWNING GLORY	269

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	Facing page
The Venerable Peter Donders, C.SS.R.	*Frontispiece*
Interior of Surinam	34
Paramaribo	64
A *tentboot*	80
Negroes and Canoes	80
Leper Children	100
Father Donders Preaching	120
Leper Girls of the *St. Gerard Majella Home*	156
An Indian Camp	176
A Carib Indian Woman	176
Church Convent and School, Tamarin	194
A School	208
A Negro and Negress	228
A Catholic Negro Village	234
A Negro Home	250
Forest and Stream	246
Tomb of Father Donders in Cathedral of Paramaribo	270
St. Gerard Majella Home for Lepers	274
Map of Surinam	END

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

If we would estimate the sanctity of the Venerable Peter Donders aright, it would be well to recall the words spoken by Pope Benedict XV when proclaiming the heroicity of the virtues of the Servant of God, Antonio Gianelli. His Holiness said:

"In the world at large, and even amongst the children of the Church, false ideas concerning heroicity in the practice of the Christian virtues have got abroad. Not the least serious of such errors is the belief that heroism of this sort can be shown only in the carrying through of difficult enterprises and the enduring of prolonged persecution, in fierce struggles issuing in brilliant victories, in a succession of singular and tragic happenings, the bare recital of which must ever thrill posterity. Now such an erroneous notion is most mischievous, for, by inducing Christians to believe that sanctity is not within the reach of all, not only does it deter them from making any serious effort to attain it even in its lowest degree, but it puts the very thought of sanctity out of their minds, under the specious pretext that, because they are disqualified for being heroes, they are dispensed from serving as ordinary soldiers.

"In contradiction to this mistaken idea of heroicity, the Church has taught unfailingly, in the words of St. Thomas, 'that the difference between ordinary and heroic virtue is a difference only of degree, in this sense particularly that in practising the latter the soul strives after goodness with greater energy than do the common run of men.'"

Again, in the answers to the observations of the Promoter of the Faith in the Cause of the Venerable

John Nepomucene Neumann, C.SS.R., we read as follows: "We can easily see, therefore, that the degrees of sanctity reached by individual saints may vary, and that the spectacular endurance which gave a lustre to the heroism of the martyrs in their violent and painful contests need not at all be looked for in the holy confessors of the Faith: it is enough that these fulfil to the very end the duties of their state in life, in accordance with the special designs God has on each of them. For, without a more pronounced striving after holiness than that displayed by most men, no child of Adam, in the midst of so many snares and dangers, may hope to remain unspotted by sin to the end of his days. Now it is just this more energetic striving after sanctity which, in the case of certain servants of God, secures their lifelong practice of the Christian virtues and sets them up as models of perfection in the eyes of their fellowmen; and it is precisely this which constitutes their heroism, especially when the peculiar circumstances in which their days were passed are borne in mind."

Such, then, is the standard we must keep in view if we would form a proper estimate of our hero. Already even as a child, later on as a working-boy, then as a student, next as a secular priest, finally as a Redemptorist—he did all things well. In Holland, thousands have sat, like him, at a weaver's loom; thousands have gone to college and studied for the priesthood; thousands have toiled, in the ranks of the secular clergy, for the salvation of their Catholic brethren. Like him, too, hundreds have crossed the seas, as missionaries, to convert the pagan; hundreds have later on become Redemptorists; many amongst these have devoted their lives to the spiritual welfare of the lepers; of these many there were who were more gifted and had more resources at their command than he: they worked under more favourable conditions and received more effectual encouragement and support. And yet, alone of all these, Peter Donders is honoured by the Church with the title of *Venerable*. And why?

Because, after a serious preliminary investigation of everything that could be known about the life of the holy man, the Church entertains the hope that a still closer study of documentary evidence will bring into the fullest light the heroic character of his virtues, as we have seen it described by the Sovereign Pontiff.

What is equally striking in this consistent doing well of all things; what runs through the countless acts of his long life like a golden thread, gathering them up and binding them into a stable and splendid whole, is the unwavering trust in God that marked the first period of his career—a trust that made him keep on repeating, in the teeth of seemingly insuperable difficulties: "All the same, I hope to be a priest some day." Then, in the second half, when that hope of his was at last crowned with the glory of the priesthood, his device, which, in peace and war, in good and evil fortune, never changed, was: *It is God's good pleasure*. These two features of his sanctity—his trust in God and his resignation to God's holy Will—we will endeavour particularly to show forth.

The sources on which we will draw for our story will put its authenticity beyond all doubt. These we will now mention in detail. First and foremost, there is Father Donders himself, who will often come before us and speak. Then we shall see a cloud of witnesses gather about him, the companions of his childhood, his schoolfellows and professors, the faithful in whose interests he worked, his superiors and his fellow-labourers in the vineyard of the Master, and, lastly, his confrères in the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer.

And this whole body of documentary evidence—correspondence, private notes, depositions made before ecclesiastical courts—it is our intention to produce textually or in an accurate summary.

From it all one fact must undoubtedly emerge: he did all things well. Not that in all things he was perfect, and that no jarring note breaks through the rich harmonies of this chorus of praise. He was

human, and we have not the slightest intention of concealing it. We will, therefore, set down truthfully whatever faults and failings witnesses found in him, and which they felt bound in conscience to reveal. Moreover, to ensure the utmost accuracy in the presentment of our hero, we will submit to the reader's consideration, as occasion offers, the objections urged against the heroicity of his virtues by the Promoter of the Faith when the Apostolic process was being introduced, with a view to his beatification. The shadows in the picture are not deep indeed, nor are these objections either many or great; however, by publishing them for what they are worth, we shall set the Servant of God in the full light of truth, while inviting the reader with greater confidence to imitate a life which, when all is said and done, is not inimitable.

We recommend our book to those who are preparing for the priesthood, as well as to such as have attained it; we recommend it to religious; we recommend it to working-men; we recommend it to those who are blessed with the good things of this world and are thus in a position to help the Church and society by furthering sacred and salutary undertakings. Not one of these classes of the faithful, we venture to think, but will be the better of these pages.

May Jesus, Mary and Alphonsus bless them and make them fruitful in such results.

Vaals.
Feast of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, 1924.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

THE original Dutch Life of the Venerable Peter Donders, published in 1924, by the Very Reverend Father Kronenburg, C.SS.R., met with unusual success in Holland, in spite of the fact that several Lives of the Servant of God, varying in bulk, had already but recently appeared and had been widely diffused. Besides the French version, which issued from the *Librairie Saint Alphonse*, in Louvain, in 1927, a German translation has since been made and is awaiting publication; a Spanish translation has been begun; while a high official in Rome has already set to work on an Italian one.

The English version we now offer the public has been made from the French. The translator wishes to thank the Redemptorist Fathers of the Dutch Province for their courtesy in supplying information on various points, as well as the Fathers of the Dutch Vice-Province of Surinam for their kindness in providing the map and the illustrations.

The cult of the heroic missionary, Father Peter Donders, is growing so rapidly, not only in his native Holland, but far beyond its frontiers, that we confidently hope that a detailed knowledge of his life will win him many an enthusiastic admirer in English-speaking countries. Indeed, if we mistake not, he belongs to that class of Saints and Servants of God whose high deeds and characteristic holiness quickly capture the imagination and the heart of the Catholic world. Owing to his specific apostolate, and the scene in which it was placed, there is in the book a strange commingling of the glamour of tropical nature and the gloom of

an atmosphere of human suffering at its very worst; but there is not a page of it but is bright with the splendour of exalted virtue, and aglow with a love for the souls of men as burning and unstinted as any to be met with even in the annals of the Saints.

JOHN CARR, C.SS.R.

St. Patrick's, Athenry.
Foreign Missionary Sunday, October 20th, 1929.

AN APOSTLE OF THE LEPERS

CHAPTER I

THE POOR YOUNG WEAVER

1809-1831

EARLY in 1835, in Tilburg, a town in Northern Brabant, there could still be seen a certain very unpretentious home: four low walls supporting a high thatched roof; in front, a green-painted door, divided horizontally in two, with a window on either side; at the rear, a small garden and a bit of ground; around the dwelling, a stretch of sward broken by a clump of trees. Hard by, to the east, was another house similar in appearance, though a little more substantial.

There was a time when the passer-by paid scant heed to this spot. To-day, more than one may be seen making expressly for it and gazing on it reverently, as he confidently breathes a prayer.

And no wonder. For many years it was the home of a child unusually favoured by heaven; of a boy with an angel's purity and a heart aflame with the love of God and souls; of a young man heroic alike in trouble and in toil; it was the home of him whom, we fondly hope, we shall one day invoke as the *Blessed Peter Donders*.

This child of benediction was born on the 27th October, 1809, and, on the very day of his birth, was regenerated in the waters of baptism in the old barn that served the purpose of a church in the little village

of De Goirke. His mother's name was Petronilla, and, after her, he was called Peter. The parish priest, Hermann Joseph Franke, and his curate, Matthias Stals, were both Canons Regular of the monastery of Tongerloo, and thus the Premonstratensians had the privilege of receiving the future Servant of God into the Church.

His father, Arnold Donders, who plied his trade at home as a weaver, was a native of Tilburg, where he was born on the 9th October, 1755. He had settled at first in Loon-op-Zand, where he married Jane Van Wanroy, on the 13th September, 1789. She died on the 16th May, 1791, leaving him no children. Soon after, he married Jane Mary Van der Waarden, by whom he had two children, who were taken off in their childhood and were followed, a few years later, by their mother.

Arnold Donders returned, at latest in the year 1798, to take up his residence in Tilburg. There he married Petronilla Van den Brekel, a townswoman of his own, and lived in the humble abode we have already described.

Within, it was as unpretentious as without. Interested as we were in the early years of a Servant of God, we considered ourselves lucky to have come across an eye-witness whose tenacious memory was able to reconstruct for us in detail the interior of a house as she had seen it half a century before. This was Mary Mathijsen, the niece of our hero's stepmother. When she came to reside near the Donders family in 1819, she was about thirteen : when we met her, she was eighty-four.

The house consisted of a living-room, a workshop, and a barn. The entrance was in front, and almost midway : there was a stone threshold, and behind it, to the right as one went in, a wooden partition doing duty for a door. In a corner of the living-room, to the left, was the fireplace, surmounted with a mantelpiece. Between the fireplace and the front door was another door opening into the workshop. Here, as a boy, Peter will sit before his loom; and here too, later on, he will

spend his holidays studying, while the neighbours' children, with their faces glued to the window-panes, try to find out what on earth their playmate can be doing. A door at the back gave access to the barn. Against the wall, to the right, stood two wooden bedsteads. A dormer-window, let into the outer wall facing the street, enabled those within to discern approaching danger or the advent of an unwelcome visitor.

Let our readers picture a table and a few chairs near the window; a cupboard at the back; a crucifix with a few pictures of Our Lady and the Saints on the walls; and, lastly, a flower-pot or two, and they will then have an accurate idea of the humble home where he whom we now honour and invoke spent and sanctified his childhood and his youth.

The boy did not see much of his mother. She died peacefully on the 21st February, 1816, leaving him a little brother called Martin, aged about five. Peter was not eight years old when, on the 19th May, 1817, his father married Jane Mary Van de Pas, a pious woman, in every way fitted to mother the orphan and make a saint of him. All who knew this God-fearing couple spoke of them as "honest folk," "plain, humble people," even as "an exceptionally virtuous pair."

Peter, then, was trained in a good school. At an early age he felt the longing to be a priest. "It pleased God," he afterwards said, "to infuse into my heart, when I was but five or six years old, a decided leaning towards the ecclesiastical state, that I might work for the salvation of those souls that are so dear to Him." And he made no secret of this, for many of those who were children with him and knew him well, declared in their old age that *Peerkin*, or *Little Peter*, as his family and friends loved to call him, would often speak of his longing to be a priest and his hopes of being such one day, badly off as his parents were.

Shortly before his mother died, the boy, then in his seventh year, let fall a remark which throws light on the turn his thoughts were taking. Ann Mary Van Dijk, a good woman who knew him well and was a

frequent caller at the house, when both she and he were mere children, related the following, being then eighty-three: "On the day his mother received the Last Sacraments, he took up from the table the book the priest had been using. As the latter took it out of his hand, little Peter expressed the hope that one day he would have a book like it himself." Soon after, he gave a fresh proof of his desire by constructing, with the help of his brother Martin, a clay chapel in the garden, where he would go through the ceremonies of the Mass with childlike devotion. Absolute innocence, an ever-growing fondness for prayer, and a denial of his own self out of all keeping with a child of his years, shielded his vocation. This he was one day to acknowledge in a brief sketch of his career which he wrote at the bidding of superiors, when an old man of seventy. Speaking of his youth, he said: "I can never thank God enough for having kept me safe from many dangers which certainly would have threatened my salvation. He gave me the grace to pray much and to practise a real, though still an imperfect devotion towards His holy Mother Mary."

It is likely that he began to go to the village school of De Heikant when he was about seven. Master Drabbe, its worthy head, is described as a man "who took a keen interest in his own little world; who bore himself with a kindly dignity both in school and out of it, and this whether he was on his way to the presbytery for the newspaper, or to the church to hear Mass or make the Way of the Cross."

We have to thank him for precious details of Peter's childhood. If the little scholar was none too smart, his application and good conduct were altogether out of the common. What was one day to become very marked, and to attract much attention, showed itself at this period: the boy's mind, given to seek its rest in God, found its natural food, so to speak, in the truths of Faith; with the result that, while he made but slow progress in secular knowledge, he advanced rapidly in his Catechism.

Master Drabbe's grandson has gleaned a detail of

these school years that we would not willingly miss. As Peter was a frail lad, he was often an absentee. Besides, his father was very careful of him. "It was quite clear," this witness relates, "that what the father dreaded above all else for his darling boy was wet feet; for, in rainy weather, he used to call to the school to bring him home. On such occasions he would bring him into a forge opposite the schoolhouse; there he would stand the little fellow on something, and then, holding an open bag in front of him on a level with his feet, would make him jump into it; whereupon, slinging the precious burden over his shoulder, he would make for home."

Such tender care on the part of the father is not hard to understand. Much as the good man longed for a numerous progeny, but two of his children had survived. As we have seen, his first wife died childless; the two children of his second marriage were taken off in infancy; while, of the two sons born to him by his third wife, the first, Peter—the hero of our story—was a puny child, and the second, Martin, was a sickly boy and somewhat deformed.

Peter's schooldays were not unduly prolonged. His poor parents, who reckoned to a certain extent on his help for their support, were anxious to put him to work. In all likelihood, he made his First Communion in 1821, before remaining at home for good. No detail of this great event has come down to us. With regard to Confirmation, we know for a fact that he received this sacrament on the 14th November, 1823, when he was fourteen, at the hands of Bishop Adrian Van Dongen, the Vicar Apostolic of Breda.

Speaking on one occasion about his work, Peter said: "I learned first to spin, then to weave, and I kept at the weaving down to the day I entered the seminary." In Master Drabbe's diary we read the following: "He was a great help to his father in the weaving. Many a time he would set to work of his own accord, and when he had to prepare the warp, he would run his bare fingers up and down—regardless of the summer's heat and the winter's cold—until all was

properly dried. Whenever there was a press of work, the weaving went on daily until ten o'clock at night, from the first Sunday in August to the 1st October; until eleven, from that date to Shrove Tuesday; and again until ten during Lent up to Wednesday in Holy Week. Not rarely did it happen that, when the pressure grew, work lasted on Saturdays until midnight, to be resumed at the same hour on the following Sunday. On these occasions, however, Peter sent his father and little Martin off to bed and went on working alone with untiring industry. To help his parents to make ends meet, he would take on other work, too. 'The poor drudge,' said an old man who knew him well, 'how he had to toil and moil for his daily bread! Did I not see him even clip the grass by the roadside and gather up the dead twigs.' "

Peter lived this life of hard work by his father's side until he was twenty-two. But, while he worked in silence, his thoughts went often far afield. At times, borne on the wings of prayer, they soared towards Jesus and Mary; at times they went sweetly dreaming of the priesthood—that priesthood which seemed so far away and yet was so desired. Humanly speaking, he saw nothing that could bring about the realization of his hopes, especially as his father made it quite clear to him that there could be no question whatever of paying for his education. But the boy was far from losing heart for all that; as he said himself in after years: "I never lost hope that I should be a priest some day."

This hope drew strength from a most childlike devotion to Our Lady, "to whom," as he said, "after God, I owe the grace of my twofold vocation—to the priesthood and to the religious life." At the same time, he left nothing undone, by faithfully corresponding with grace and leading a life of genuine piety, to bring about the accomplishment of his dream.

To begin with, from his very childhood he excelled in the practice of what St. Alphonsus so truly calls *the great means of salvation*—the means by which all graces come to us—namely, prayer. All who knew him at

this period are at one in declaring that his spirit of prayer was quite exceptional.

It was to the church he most willingly bent his steps; and although it was half an hour's walk from his home, he would have gladly gone there every day, had his work allowed him. On Sundays, at any rate, he fully made up for the privations of the week. At an early hour he would hurry off to the House of God, and would not return home till noon, after having spent the greater part of his time before the Tabernacle. This we learn from that worthy widow, Mary Mathijsen, who, as we have stated, spent several years under the same roof with him. Another good widow, Jane Huileman, confirms it. She found out from his brother Martin that "little Peter was always the first into the church and the last to leave it. He had made it a point to visit it daily, if possible. He might be said to have spent his whole Sunday there, saying to his brother that 'Sunday is given us for that purpose.'"

A private letter throws much light on this bent of his. A youth named Biezemortels, his junior by two years, lived close by, and the two boys saw a good deal of each other. Now we are told that Peter would often call for Biezemortels at daybreak, and that they would then go together to the church. On these occasions, he generally carried a big prayer-book under his arm. An incident that occurred many years later shows the great veneration in which Biezemortels held his comrade. When a foreign missionary in America, Peter had sent to a family in Tilburg a few bottles containing certain herbs from Surinam. Now Biezemortels even purchased two of these, that he might have some sort of relic of Father Donders, and they remained in his family for quite a long time.

Peter used to pray a great deal at home, too, especially at work. "Anybody who entered the room," Mary Mathijsen tells us, "was sure to find him busy, working and praying unceasingly." That his work suffered a little occasionally was only to be expected. And so his employer, Jansenns Van Buren, found fault with it at times. "Alas!" he would say, "the poor

lad is not an expert." "However," he would add kindly, "we must make allowance for him; he is too busy with God." And that was just the way to put it. The truth was that God was drawing the soul of this working-boy irresistibly to Himself, and all day long the thoughts of his mind and the love of his heart went upwards.

And even when his day's work was done and the day long dead, Peter would prolong his converse with God, on his knees, far into the night, no matter how cold it was, and even when there was not a spark on the hearth to heat the poor room. Martin, with whom he shared his bed, tells us that his brother used to shiver with cold on such occasions.

A schoolfellow named Matthias Broeckx, who, for all his ninety-one years, vividly recalled the past, said in reference to his devotion in prayer: "In his youth, Peter was regarded as an exceptionally good boy; many a time I saw him praying, and his piety attracted everybody's attention."

Let us hear what another—Jane Melis—has to say. Though she did not know Peter personally, still her testimony is first-hand. "Reverend Father Donders was, on his mother's side, the nephew of my father-in-law, Michael Van den Brekel. He often spoke of him to me when I was but a child. 'Even from his tenderest years,' my father-in-law would say, 'Peter was a model of piety in church. Everyone looked on him as a holy boy. The parish priest, Van de Ven, in particular, thought a great deal of him. Others also frequently sung his praises to me, especially on the subject of his edifying behaviour, and they would add that it was a great pity his poverty prevented him from becoming a priest. He never looked about him on his way to the church, but walked modestly on. Everyone spoke highly of his attitude within the sacred precincts; he edified all. He usually knelt in a corner at the top of the church, near the communion rails, on the Gospel side. There he would remain kneeling with joined hands. The parish priest would often say we had a saint in the family.'"

This spirit of prayer was nurtured by holy reading. "Little Peter," says his brother Martin, "led a most pious life in our midst, dividing his time between work, reading, and prayer. He read every good book he could lay his hands on from cover to cover."

A heart such as his, so pure and kept so near to God by recollection and prayer, naturally longed for an ever closer intimacy with Jesus Christ by means of Holy Communion. "He communicated every Sunday," one of his companions tells us. "I know for certain," says another, "that Peter received every Sunday, and twice a week besides."

All the while, the Holy Ghost was making the pious youth realize at an early age that, if he would one day become a perfect priest, he should imitate Jesus Christ in His life of prayer and tread in His footsteps the Way of the Cross. For, after all, it was chiefly through His Passion and Death that the Man-God became our Priest.

We are not told that at this period of his life he gave himself up to any special penitential practices, but his patience and generosity were quite beyond his years. Anything he got he invariably gave away. A labouring man named James Paulussen, though almost an octogenarian, could still recall "how wonderfully good he was to his parents. He would have given them everything, and have done anything for them. He never begged; but anything he got he handed it over to them at once."

That a boy of this sort was not going to have it all his own way was only what was to be expected. We know how small boys love teasing those who are better behaved than themselves. Now this teasing Peter had to go through; he came in for a great deal of it, and he bore it with a patience that nothing could disturb. "Whenever unpleasant things were said to him," we are told, "he just went outside for a while; and when he came in again, he looked as if nothing amiss had happened."—"No matter what was said to him," declares another witness, "he never minded." Says a

third: "They sometimes made fun of him, but he took it all in good part."—"As he always walked quietly through the town," says a schoolmate, "he came in for much laughing and banter on the part of urchins; yet never did I see him take it badly. To get away from them, he would sometimes turn down a side street."

Forbearance of this sort developed within him the habit of that highly meritorious kind of self-denial which consists in the submission of one's own will to the will of another. He was a model of obedience to his parents. Mary Mathijsen, who saw him daily, speaks of him as having been exceptionally obedient. "I never heard a complaint or a retort from his lips," she says, "and his countenance was always unruffled." He was equally submissive to anyone set over him. "I went to school with him," yet another tells us, "and never once did I see him take part in any of those thoughtless acts so dear to mischievous schoolboys." On one witness being asked if Peter had ever to be punished in school or at Catechism, he replied: "No, never; on the contrary, many a time the parish priest held him up as a model to us all."

From his dealings with others, as well as from his own inner life, it was easy to foresee the future missionary. The holy passion for souls with which he was already fired was even then bursting into flame. With the leave of his parish priest, he spent his free time catechizing the children and teaching them their prayers. Apart from this, he had but little to do with them. And, as a witness naïvely remarks: "Peter did not do this to make money, but out of sheer devotion. He taught Catechism two or three times a day, at meal hours, and his parents never minded, as they knew he would not give a second to it that should go to his work." A tertiary named Simons, speaking on the subject, tells how "the children used to listen with attention and in perfect silence to their young master. To gain this hearing, he would sometimes produce a few trifles from his pocket and hand them round." One who had been taught her Catechism as a child by

this good tertiary could recall, half a century later, how her mistress loved to tell them all about Peter. She used to speak of him as a holy boy whom everybody looked up to; and whenever her own pupils got out of hand, she would suddenly exclaim: '*One, two, three! Silence!*' just as Peter used to do, and—not a syllable was heard after that."

But these children did more than revere their young friend: they loved him, and it was easy to see it by the eagerness with which they hurried to his class when the time came. Whenever any of them gave trouble, he never lost his patience, but tried to restore order with a kind word. As soon as the lesson was over, the youthful professor who, though a small boy, displayed even then a priestly greatness of soul, took a step nearer the sanctuary. He would get up on an improvised pulpit—it was usually his mother's wash-tub—and treat his companions to a short homily, bringing proceedings to a close by leading them to the church for prayers.

In the diary already quoted, we read concerning his pupils: "As none of these children could read, there was nothing for it but to hammer the words into their heads by dint of repetition," and the patience the young catechist showed at this tiresome work is beyond all telling. Very often, while on the way home from High Mass or Benediction, surrounded by his little pupils, he would turn the time to account by going over for them the lessons they had already learned. One of his old pupils, Peter Spijkers, lets us into his method: "Peter Donders began by giving out the answers in the Catechism, which he afterwards made us repeat. He then explained the doctrine in his own fashion, exhorting us to live up to the lessons we had just heard. The children I knew best—as well as myself—went to his classes gladly." As for the trust the local clergy put in him, we know this much from old Widow Van de Wouwer: "One day," she says—"he might have been sixteen at the time—he was commissioned by his parish priest to give an instruction to the children in the church itself. And both parish

priest and curate, who had followed it from the altar rails, agreed that never had they heard the Catechism better taught."

Now the whole business was not at all to his brother Martin's liking, and he never let a chance go by of making fun of it. " 'Tis all childishness," he would say. He thought it silly for boys to flock round *Peerken* like that. But his parents were far from being of this mind, and were highly edified by such zeal on the part of their son. Besides, Martin soon came round to their way of thinking, and, later on, when he saw for himself the fruits of Peter's labours, he would often say: " My brother will certainly have a very high place in heaven."

Amongst the numerous children who were privileged to attend his class, many recalled it with pleasure even in their old age. Let us hear a few of them. " I was seven years old," says Norbert Augustine Van Son, a fine old labouring man of seventy-four, " when Peter taught me Catechism." The three sisters of John Van Baast, of Tilburg, had a lively recollection of the little discourse that used to follow the catechetical instruction. Henry Smarius, an old weaver of seventy-eight, thus delivered himself: " When I was about seven, Peter often called into our house, and I remember well where he used to sit. He generally put questions from the Catechism to my brother and would give him a picture if he answered correctly."

And thus the early years of the Servant of God went by in the peaceful atmosphere of home. The same diligence at his daily work, and the same striving to grow in wisdom and grace before God and men marked his youth. And yet, if he were to go on at this rate, how was he to reach the wished-for goal and become a priest? " Humanly speaking," he afterwards admitted, " it seemed out of the question that my dream should ever be fulfilled." For all that, his confidence remained unshaken. As he said, " what helped to keep up my hopes and root them more deeply in my heart were the numerous proofs of His goodness that divine Providence was pleased to strew along my path."

Amongst these favours, he rightly saw the intervening hand of God in the happy outcome of an event that might easily have had a very different and a very disastrous influence on his career. The year 1828 brought with it the day, dreaded by so many youths, when he had to draw lots for military service. Let us hear Peter himself. "I drew a very bad number," he tells us; "57 out of a total of 106. But the Lord came to my rescue. I was not very robust at that time, as anyone could see by looking at me. And so, on the doctor's advice, I was put back for a year. This was repeated five times over, and, by a loving disposition of God's goodness, I was thus definitely exempted from military service."

This happened on the 3rd February, 1832. Peter had completed his twenty-second year. Then it was that he thought the time ripe for taking a definite step. "I considered," he wrote, "that prayer alone was no longer enough, and that I should be up and doing as well. So I made up my mind to write to my confessor, who was my parish priest, and ask him to help me to begin the study of Latin."

It must be said that this letter came as no surprise to the priest. Both as curate in De Goirke from 1817 to 1821, and after his appointment as parish priest to the same parish in 1826, he knew his young penitent a long time, and knew him well, as he had had many a chat with him in the presbytery. He was no stranger, therefore, to Peter's ardent longings for the priesthood; for years, too, he had seen with admiring eyes his many solid virtues, and especially the zeal for souls that consumed him. It was clear that if ever anyone deserved to have the way to the sanctuary paved for him, it was Peter. At the same time, the boy's letter put the good man in a difficulty.

Here was a youth of twenty-two who had only a primary education, and a very defective one at that, on account of his poor ability and his very limited schooling. What chance had he of being able to get up enough Latin and Greek to pull through his philosophy and theology? And besides, even though he succeeded

in doing this, where was the benefactor to come from who would make himself responsible for the considerable outlay that whole years of study would entail? The boy's father was not to be thought of. It would be as much as the poor weaver could do to provide the outfit.

Now, though fully alive to the difficulty, Peter lost none of his confidence, and remained unshaken in his conviction that, in spite of every obstacle, he would one day stand at the altar.

He had written his letter during the Octave of Pentecost, and he must have invoked the Holy Ghost with more than usual fervour. The parish priest seemingly acted on an inspiration of the same divine Spirit when he decided on setting his fears at nought and taking up so worthy a cause. At any rate, it was shortly after this that he took definite steps to settle the money question first. He did not meet with the same success in every quarter. One father of a family, we are told, refused to give any help, on the plea that if he thought he had money to spend in that way, he would have begun with his own children. "My grandfather often expressed his regret for this later on," the witness declares. However, he met with more generosity elsewhere, and it is a pleasure to give honourable mention in these pages to Father Van Someren, a holy and distinguished priest who resided in De Goirke from 1826 to 1829, and to a certain Madame Mutsaerts, whose generosity enabled the young man not only to begin his studies, but to pursue them to the end.

But the way was not yet clear. The President of the Preparatory Seminary, John Henry Smits, raised the objection that had already occurred to the parish priest: would the candidate have ability enough to get through? And, in the unfortunate event of his failing, would not the wrench from his natural surroundings be all the more painful afterwards for his having to return to his home? The situation was a delicate one, and a compromise was decided on: Peter was to go to college, not as a student—at least for the present—but in the capacity of a servant-boy, and was to devote his spare

time to his books and thus find out his chances of success.

The news was communicated to the family by one of the curates, Father Ægidius Vogels, who, twelve years later, became a Redemptorist.

Certainly, the opportunity afforded the boy was none too brilliant; but so strong was his trust in God that he regarded it unhesitatingly as the first serious step leading him to the realization of his dream; and great was his joy. "I never saw him so happy," Mary Mathijsen tells us, "as on the day he got word of his admission to the seminary."

Nearly forty years later, when a Redemptorist missionary in Guiana, and attached to the leper settlement in Batavia, he still remembered that message and its messenger, and to the latter, who had written to him for news of his mission, he replied: "It gives me the greatest possible pleasure, Very Reverend Father, to write you these few lines and to comply with your request. Who has a better right to hear occasionally from me than Your Reverence? It is now a long time since I had the happiness of seeing you and speaking with you. It was you who brought me the good news of my admission to the Preparatory Seminary, and with it the hope of getting through my studies and thus, at long last, through a mysterious providence of God, and notwithstanding my own unworthiness, of receiving Holy Orders and eventually becoming a missionary."

When the academic year began, then, in the autumn of 1831, Peter set off with a joyful heart for the Seminary of *Sint Michiels-Gestel*. He was accompanied by a near neighbour, a day-labourer named Van Son, who told afterwards how, on the same day, Peter's mother remarked to those who stood looking on as she was pulling down the little clay chapel: "He was always dreaming of becoming a priest." Peter was the bearer of a letter from the parish priest to the President containing the following words: "I am sending you this young man that you may do with him what you think best; but Tilburg is no place for him." No,

indeed, the world was no place for him, and the Sanctuary was calling out for him; his whole past was there to prove it, as are all those who have ever known him, down to our own day.

And so, before we follow the Servant of God to the seminary, we would—even at the risk of being thought tedious—gather about him some of those who appeared as witnesses during the diocesan process—all of them, like himself, people of humble station. They saw him and they heard him; their life was lived with his. Though then in their seventies and eighties, his memory was still green amongst them, and it was sweet and holy. Full of admiration for his character and virtues, they spoke as follows:

"I knew Father Donders well," says Matthias Broeckx, with his ninety years upon him. "We went to Master Drabbe's school together for six months. As he was a delicate-looking boy and very quiet, he had to put up with a great deal from others, but he never minded and just gave way to them. . . . We were both about twelve at the time. We all regarded him as an extraordinary boy. He always went quietly through the streets, and this made him the butt of many a gibe on the part of other boys; but I never saw him get angry. He avoided this teasing—though not always—by slipping down a side street."

Let us hear another nonagenarian—Peter Reijnen: "I knew Peter Donders well; I went to school with him, and to the very day he went to the seminary as a servant, I was intimate with him. He had a great reputation for virtue . . . and he certainly gave great example. Everybody knew that."

Next comes James Paulussen, in his seventy-ninth year. "I knew Peter Donders well," he tells us. "I was about six when I went to his Catechism classes with other children. I always got on very well with him. . . . He would never get angry. He was often in the church. He was a model of love and generosity towards his parents."

Let us now hear Joseph Van Spaandonk, the Headmaster at *Den Hond*—a good man of seventy-seven:

"Many a time I was in his home with my father, who was a cousin of Peter's stepmother, and many a time I was given this piece of advice on such occasions: 'Try to be as good as Peter, and learn your Catechism as well as he.'"

All his friends and acquaintances of those days speak of him in the same way. To these must be added numerous others who picked up all sorts of edifying things about him from eye-witnesses in every way trustworthy. "I have always heard," declares the Dean of Bladel, Father Francis Van der Wee, "that from his earliest years he excelled in every virtue." Doctor Peter Deckers, Norbert Donders—a namesake of our hero—and many others besides, bear like testimony.

But we have said enough. We will draw this chapter, therefore, to a close by quoting what Mgr. Swagemakers, the Vicar General of Bois le Duc, wrote to Father Van Coll, our hero's first biographer: "Even as a child, he impressed all good people. There was not one but was edified by his reverence in church and his devotion at prayer. His simple and prompt obedience, his uprightness and humility, his industry, his zeal for souls—for although he worked the whole day long, he would encroach on his sleep to instruct the little children—all these virtues won him general esteem. It was no matter for surprise, then, that the local clergy decided to make a priest of so exceptional a boy."

CHAPTER II

SERVANT-BOY AND STUDENT

1831-1837

PETER was fully twenty-two when he entered the seminary. At an age when, for most ecclesiastical students, the priesthood is already coming into view, he began to take the first steps that led to it, with the sure prospect before him of having to face a long road. Of course, were he naturally a student, he would have looked on this as an advantage rather than anything else, and it would have proved no mean source of encouragement. Unfortunately, he was not at all a brilliant lad, and this lack of ability was to keep him stretched on the rack of uncertainty for many a long day. Furthermore, his primary education, almost worthless as it was, had suffered from those twelve years given wholly up to the winning of his daily bread. Then his very constitution seemed to be against him, and rebelled against any prolonged mental strain. Nor was this all. It was the year 1831, when Belgium was in a state of political turmoil. Great numbers of young men fit for military service had been called to the colours. The servant staff of the college had, consequently, been considerably reduced, with the result that Peter had to take his place in their ranks, at least provisionally. It was decided, therefore, that, for the first six months, he should devote himself to housework and that he should not study at all.

Apart from the fact that the realization of his dreams was thus deferred, such an arrangement was very hard on the poor boy, as his fellow-servants, thinking he was

a spy in the interests of superiors, did not hesitate to display their aversion and mistrust. And yet, throughout these fresh trials, the sure though distant light of the priesthood ever gladdened his eyes and kept his heart stout. "I felt certain," he used to say, "that I should one day be a priest."

When the six months were up, the arrival of an additional servant somewhat bettered his situation. While kept at his ordinary work, he was now allowed to attend class and give to his books whatever time he had over. It was something to be thankful for, and the young man knew it. But he was soon made to realize that the cup had not yet been drained. Not only did the servants keep up their ill-feeling towards him whom they now considered less than ever one of their own sort, but new enemies had to be reckoned with in class-mates who, more through thoughtlessness indeed than malice, set themselves to make things decidedly unpleasant for him, especially in the beginning.

We can well imagine the emaciated, pale-faced youth, awkward and shy, and shabbily clad, beginning Latin grammar with a class of some ten to twenty boys full of animal spirits and up to every mischief. For six whole months they had seen him at work about the house, serving at table and elsewhere; and now here he comes and sits on the same bench with themselves! We can see him seated by himself in the farthest corner of the class-room, thumbing an old battered and tattered book, in which he is quite at sea. After listening to the explanations and questions of the master, without understanding a word, he gives ridiculous answers that set the whole class in a roar. Nothing more was wanted to awaken in those boys, who had not yet undergone the subduing influence of college life, their natural love of banter, which not seldom, alas! fell nothing short of downright cruelty.

Some of them were one day to admit it. Many amongst them took fiendish delight in letting themselves go, and in giving the inoffensive youth the benefit of their ugly humours. They pushed him to one side and the other, they pummelled him, they pulled him by the

hair, they worried and tormented him in every possible way. Whenever the professors happened to leave the refectory for a few moments, while he was going about his duties there, wild scenes ensued. Some yelled at the top of their voices: "Hallo old Pharisee!" Others roared out to him: "Come here, Peter, you old scarecrow!" Then they would rush at him, rag him, knock him about till he could scarcely keep on his feet.

His worst moments came when the tailor appeared at the door. It was Peter's duty to give back to the boys the clothes they had sent out to be mended, and to send out more for the same purpose. The money for this passed, moreover, through his hands, a fact that naturally made him look alive. Then it was that the pitiless youngsters did all they could to make things hard for him. They pulled him about, jostled him, and rammed sticks between his legs to trip him. In a word, there was no nasty trick they could think of which they did not play on their unfortunate victim.

Eventually, these very young scamps were to sing his virtues the loudest. Half a century later, in 1887, one of them wrote: "I can never forget his humility. As he was a servant as well as a student, the very moment class was over, he set about the work of the house with an industry that made him a model to us all. Empty-headed puppies that we were, we used to treat him, in the beginning at least, with the utmost contempt. How often was his humility put severely to the test! But no matter what abuse he got, he never once lost his truly angelic patience. All we generally got for our scoffing and our cruelty was a good-natured smile, as much as to say: 'All right, if you like, I'm but a poor good-for-nothing schoolboy, taken in through charity.' However, the day was to come when we were to have our eyes opened. It was soon brought home to us—short-sighted brats that we were—how much that fine young fellow, whom we were making the butt of our jeers and our blows, really deserved our sympathy. At last, the humility of *Peerke Donders*, as we called him, his forbearance and invincible patience, got the upper hand of our ill-nature and won our hearts.

Our unjust contempt was then replaced by the highest esteem and the most genuine affection."

Others speak in a like strain. "He was a marvel of patience," says a class-fellow; "so much so that nobody ever succeeded in nettling him." Says a third: "I can testify that his humility, meekness and forbearance were amazing. Though jeered at and abused—and this often—he ever remained calm and self-possessed. I certainly never saw him lose his temper. He met the greatest rudeness with a pleasant smile, and with an unruffled and even a joyful countenance. At times, when things were really going too far, he would just say: 'Hush, hush,' very gently, and nothing stronger ever fell from his lips than: 'Oh, the rascals!'"

One day, however, unable to stand it any longer, he went in great distress and knocked at the President's door. Out of breath and red in the face, he went in. "Well, Peerke," said the Superior, breaking off a conversation with Professor Spierings, "what's the trouble now?"—"Oh, Father," the boy replied, "I must really complain of the students this time."—"About what? Did you catch them swearing or using bad words?"—"Oh, worse than that, Father; they actually called me *Saint Peerke*." The Professor burst out laughing. This made Peter more indignant than ever, as he failed to understand how a priest could laugh at such profanation. In his humility and modesty, the young man had not the slightest suspicion that his actions were a reflection on the behaviour of his companions, and still less that he surpassed them in any way; and it took the two priests all their time to quiet him. As he entered the recreation-room, rather dazed, the cause of all the mischief went over to him, and tapping him in a friendly way on the shoulder, said: "Come, Peter, listen to me: *Saint Peerke* you are, and *Saint Peerke* you'll remain, though we'll never call you so again; in future we'll call you *Donders Peerke*."[1]

We must not for a moment think that all this insult

[1] *Donders Peerke*: an allusion to his surname, which means: *Thunder*. Perhaps the nearest thing in English would be: *The devil of a little Peter*.—Tr.

and annoyance left our hero quite unmoved. As the sequel will show, Peter was no stoic. He was naturally sensitive and tender-hearted, and home influences had but served to make him more so. Any unkind behaviour cut him to the quick. He had grown up in the warm atmosphere of his family. In Tilburg, all those associated with him in any way fell under his charm. He had never met with anything but affection, and, to the day he left for the seminary, he had always moved in a circle of friends to whom he could give his fullest trust and from whom he derived nothing but consolation and joy. What a change, then, his new surroundings were for him! And how dreadfully lonely and forsaken he must have often felt in the crowded and noisy college! Even though he succeeded in keeping back his tears in his dark hours, we can guess how his heart was wrung.

But this persecution on the part of merciless school-boys was far from being all he had to go through. His difficulties with his books were another source of anguish. These were—or seemed to be—so serious that it was for long the general feeling in the seminary that Peter would never be anything more than a model servant-boy. And indeed, apart from Christian doctrine, it did not seem at all likely that his efforts would ever be rewarded by the attainment even of the necessary minimum of any other kind of knowledge. Even the art of elocution seemed beyond him. One day he had managed with great difficulty to get an oratorical passage into his head for declamation. When the time came, he stepped forward. But what a figure he cut! With his eyes closed tight, and making all kinds of grimaces, he kept gesticulating in the most meaningless way with his coarse, working-boy's hands. There was a general titter. He got through, however, though God alone knows what it must have cost him.

We mentioned Christian doctrine. There it was that his turn came. Whenever there was question of God and holy things—in matters pertaining to Bible History and Christian doctrine especially—not only was he good, but amongst the best. In time, and by dint of

hard work, he made slow but steady progress even in secular knowledge, and we have it on the authority of Father Kamp, who later on became President of the seminary, that "Peter was by no means at the tail of his class, but pressed the leaders hard."

When he was not at his books, he was just as busy with his duties as a servant. He never took recreation, and while the other boys were at play or on a walk, he was at some manual work. And he was a thorough worker, who never spared himself and made no distinction between what was of greater and what might seem to be of lesser importance in his eyes. The one thing that guided and drew him on was a sense of duty. Whenever he was commissioned, during recreation, to go and tell a boy that his professor wanted him, Peter, guessing that the pupil was in for a scolding or a trouncing, would approach the wanted youth with more than his customary meekness, making it plain that he was the bearer of such a message with reluctance and only through obedience.

When he was about half-way through his college course, a great sorrow fell upon him. On the 28th December, 1834, he lost his father. What loving memories of that father Peter had brought away from home with him! The tender care he had lavished on his childhood; the good advice and the unfailing example of piety and industry he had given; the long hours spent by his side in the workshop, learning the art of weaving; the good man's delight when told that his boy's vocation was no longer looked on as a dream; and the hope this worthy father entertained that, in spite of his seventy-nine years, he would one day see his dear son stand at the altar—all this now came back clearly to the young man's mind, making his grief more keen.

And, then, he drew but sorry comfort from his immediate surroundings. His friend, Father Van Someren, who was professing philosophy at the time, showed genuine sympathy with him indeed in his trouble, which he fully realized, and was not sparing in heartfelt words of consolation. Superiors also were

sincere in their condolence. But the wretched boys gave him no respite. Then the servants were never anything but uncivil, and they had never laid aside the aloofness and mistrust they had shown him from the outset.

The generous youth bore this cross, as he bore all others, with humble and uncomplaining resignation, taking an austere delight in making this sacrifice to his Crucified God. From this on, all his earthly loves were snatched from him one by one. His father was not long dead when his brother Martin had the old home—the scene of so many innocent joys—pulled down, and on the 21st August, 1835, the two brothers sold the property, which comprised the land on which the cottage stood, the garden in which Peter had played the priest in the little chapel he had himself built, and the adjoining piece of ground. Their step-mother left Tilburg and withdrew to Enschot, her native place.

Peter had now no home of his own. When the holidays came round, therefore, he had to throw himself on the hospitality of kind friends, at least whenever he did not stay in the seminary. Mary Ann Van Kempen, the old housekeeper in the presbytery, speaks thus on the subject: "Peter preferred to put up at the presbytery. This made some of the parishioners rather jealous, as the young man was very pleasant in his ways and easy to get on with, and they were anxious to have him for a few days; but in this matter he consulted his own tastes and chose rather to accept the hospitality of the parochial house."

Master Drabbe, to whom we owe so many interesting details concerning his pupil's schooldays, relates the following, which he had on the authority of the Mother General of the Sisters of Charity, who, like Peter, was a native of De Heikant: "Whenever Peter Donders stayed with the parents of this future religious during the holidays, he always slept on a straw mattress."

The source of all his strength in the practice of virtue—a source at which he drank even as a child, and to which he now went with a greater thirst than ever—

was prayer. His spirit of prayer kept growing apace. To its exercise he gave all his free time. As soon as his work was done, he betook himself to the chapel, where, motionless and recollected, he was soon lost in God.

His piety attracted general attention. " It was our impression," one of his class-mates declares, " that his prayer was unceasing, and that his thoughts were always on God, even during his work and while he was waiting on us."—" It is my belief," adds another, " that Peter usually lived in the presence of God." According to a third, " Peter possessed the spirit of prayer to an eminent degree; his life was one of deep piety. His attitude at prayer was so reverential that we seemed to be looking on another St. Aloysius."

We can well imagine how a youth so far advanced in the ways of prayer longed for the Eucharist. After all, it was at the Holy Table that he met that Jesus for Whom he lived and in Whom he hoped, even against all hope. While some of the boys received every Sunday, Peter alone made it a point to receive during the week. His place was at the end of the chapel, behind the students and professors and amongst the servants, and it was a source of great edification to see him slowly and devoutly make his way up to the altar rails to receive his God. His piety was evident to all, and we need not wonder if others followed suit, and if many a seminarist dated his practice of frequent Communion from that time.

His lively faith in God animated and guided him in his relations with those who took God's place in his regard. In the course of the diocesan process in Bois le Duc, the following question was put to a witness: " Did the Servant of God, to your knowledge, ever utter a word prejudicial to authority? " Clear and explicit came the answer: " No, never; neither in the Preparatory nor in the Theological Seminary did I ever hear him utter a single uncharitable word. I go further, and I venture to affirm that, neither in the one institution nor the other, was there a single student who ever knew him to fail in this matter."

In terms no less explicit do they testify unanimously to his obedience. On all occasions, and with the best of good will, he would do anything to oblige another, except when his doing so meant infringing orders. Then he was unyielding. "I remember," a student declares, "that they sometimes tried to induce him to take snuff—which was forbidden. It was all no use; he was adamant. At last they gave up asking him to do the slightest thing against the rules, as they knew he would never give way."

At times he went the length of denying himself what was quite lawful, and from this period dates that austere temperance, some instances of which, at a later date, were to make onlookers stare. To mention what may seem a small thing—from this time he began to go without tea or beer at the afternoon refection, though nearly everybody took it.

No narrow-mindedness, however, no scrupulosity, no irritability of manner ever marked this ruthlessness in the discharge of whatever he deemed his duty. Though he received Holy Communion several times a week, he went to confession but once during that period, and he went to the President himself, Father Smits. He was otherwise most good-humoured, laughed heartily with the rest, and was never anything but pleasant and kind. In a word, his whole exterior reflected the peace and joy of his soul.

A fellow-student has given us the following sketch of him: "His whole bearing bespoke humility. There was nothing affected about him. He never carried his head high, nor did he let it droop upon his chest. He was never hurried as he went about, but always quiet and self-possessed. His countenance wore no trace of bitterness or melancholy, but was habitually untroubled and serene. There was a softness in his very voice. He who would try to make him angry or even to ruffle him ever so little got nothing for his pains. To do his duty in all things was his one concern, and to do it for God his only aim. He gave no heed to what went on around him."

As we have said, virtue such as this eventually

opened the eyes of his fellow-students to the treasure in their midst. " At last we came to realize," one of them confesses, " that the object of all our gibes was a most lovable youth, and that these fell quite wide of their mark. Slowly but surely Peter Donders won his way into our affections; and eventually the esteem and genuine love his beautiful character called for were lavished upon him."

His young friends went further. They now gave their class-mate a helping hand in his work, some by getting him over difficulties in history or mathematics, others by supplying him with books and class requisites, or by coming to his assistance in other ways.

Not that there was no recrudescence of their boyish love for teasing, but this had its better element, as the following incident shows. One day, when Peter was in the country with some other students, one of them, wishing to test his well-known zeal for the foreign missions, pointed to a ditch, saying : " Here is sixpence for the missions, Peter, if you clear that." Peter, who would have gone through fire and water for the missions, did not hesitate a moment. How could he, and a contribution for the Propagation of the Faith the prize ! Without reflecting that jumping ditches was not at all in his line, he took a spring, jumped and—splash ! in he went up to the waist in water. Everybody laughed. And Peter laughed, too. Why should he worry? He failed, of course, but then the missions were the gainers, for his comrade, like a decent fellow, rewarded the brave effort by bestowing the prize.

If it be true, then, as has been asserted, that nothing more was meant, in the beginning at any rate, than to put his virtue to the test, it must be admitted that, by the end of his preparatory studies, the so-called test was an eminently decisive one. While, on his entrance into the seminary, all, or nearly all, slighted him and sometimes even treated him with positive contempt, he issued from its walls the object of general esteem, and, it is no exaggeration to say, admired and reverenced as a saint. He had unconsciously raised an enduring monument to his own greatness. We know how ingenious boys

are in their choice of nicknames. Now the young seminarists used afterwards to give the name *Peerke* to such amongst them as were distinguished for good behaviour, and this custom was kept up for quite a long time. What is more, from that time many were convinced that Peter was a real saint, and that he would one day be raised to the honours of the altar. Father Augustine Mulders, the parish priest of Velddriel, an old man of eighty-five, spoke as follows on the subject: "I knew Peter Donders very well in both seminaries. It was the common opinion that he was a holy youth. Personally, I always thought he would become a saint. Many a time I expressly said as much to my friends and my servants. 'I have not the slightest doubt about it,' I would say, 'a day will come when we shall be honouring him as such.' When I heard of his death, I felt more inclined to invoke him than to pray for him, and I remarked to the servants: 'I really do not see why I should recommend him to God, for he is certainly in heaven.'"

One of his professors, Father Charles Janson, who became a Redemptorist in 1852, used to speak with admiration of his pupil, and praise his remarkable virtue highly. Another of his teachers, Father Kamp, thus summed up what everybody thought: "The day he left us for the Theological Seminary, the servants were unanimous in declaring that nobody could say of him: He did not do this or that right. The students looked on him as unrivalled. We professors admired in him one who, throughout the livelong day, did everything for God and in union with God." A few years later, this same Professor, then President, said: "There is not one who knew Donders at college but is ready to bear the same testimony."

CHAPTER III

IN THE SEMINARY OF HERLAAR

1837-1841

THOSE whom God singles out for the doing of great things, He singles out likewise for the endurance of great suffering. Peter Donders was of these. He was now twenty-six, and so far his life had been an unbroken series of difficulties and humiliations. Nor was the path that lay before him, now that he had reached the gates of the Theological Seminary, less tortuous and thorny. Superiors, indeed, no longer doubted his vocation; but there still confronted the young aspirant to the priesthood the disquieting question of his own dire poverty. Even now, how was he to meet the fresh heavy outlay which the continuation and completion of his studies must entail? Then, when he would be due for ordination, where was his patrimony to come from? Lastly, there remained the alarming prospect of trying to make ends meet in the future, with the slender income he could hope to dispose of. Taking all this into account, the President deemed it wiser to entrust Peter's career to a religious Congregation. His maintenance would thus be practically secured.

The Superior was strengthened in his opinion by the decided inclination for the foreign missions shown for quite a long while by the young man himself. Indeed it seems not at all unlikely that the shrewd President had the fostering of such an inclination in view when he had the *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* sent him regularly during his last years in the seminary.

The attraction the foreign missions held out to this apostolic soul was no secret to those amongst whom he lived, and, even at that time, it was an accepted principle that whoever contemplated such a career should seek admission into a religious order.

"The fact is," Peter himself wrote later on, "that I felt no particular attraction to the religious life at that period, nor, indeed, for quite a long time afterwards. My one desire was to become a priest in order to devote myself to the salvation of souls. However, not wishing to disobey the President, I went to Ghent and presented myself as a postulant before the Provincial of the Jesuits. As soon as he heard my age, he said that I was not called to the Society, and I left Ghent the following day. When I got back in the morning, I was told to go and try the Redemptorists in Saint-Trond. 'It will be practically the same,' the President said. Once more I obeyed and went off with a letter of introduction from the President of the Preparatory Seminary. 'In case the Redemptorists do not receive you,' he added, 'there are plenty of convents in Saint-Trond; try them all and seek admission.' I followed his directions. The Rector of the Redemptorists enrolled me in the four scapulars and then, after keeping me in the house for two days, sent me off to Liége with another postulant to interview the Provincial, Very Reverend Father de Held. It was there I met Father Bernard for the first time, and spoke to him. I did not know French, and Father Provincial did not understand Dutch, and so Father Bernard kindly acted as interpreter for me. When he heard my story, the Provincial was of opinion that I was not destined to be one of them. Then, still acting through obedience, I went off to the Franciscans in Saint-Trond. These Fathers were rather suspicious of me, and not without reason, as my letters of introduction had been opened, and they refused to receive me there and then. However, they advised me to apply again the following year, when I should have finished my philosophy, in case I were still of the same mind. Whereupon I returned on foot to the seminary. I had failed all along the line, but I had one consola-

tion: I had at any rate acted through obedience, and in accordance with the President's directions. On my way back, I prayed thus to God: 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' Now, while I was thus recommending myself to His Providence, God gave me such real consolation that I could not have been happier had I succeeded, and deep down in my heart I felt fully convinced that, in spite of all, a priest and a missionary I should one day be. God be praised! Who consoles us in all our tribulations. I had brought a letter from the Father Guardian of the Franciscans in Saint-Trond back with me. However, it was decided that I should no longer turn my thoughts in that direction, as my vocation was not there, but that I should do my philosophy first, with my class, and then my theology." It was thus that Peter, many years afterwards, gave his own account of the marches and counter-marches he made in quest of his vocation.

On the 4th October, 1837, within a few weeks of his twenty-eighth birthday, he entered the Theological Seminary of Herlaar. He was to spend two years within its walls. The reputation for heroic virtue he had acquired in Tilburg and in the Preparatory Seminary had gone before him. He was received, not merely with kindness, but with respect. The name *Donders Peerke* had had its day: henceforth he was called *Mr. Donders*. And this respect kept ever growing, so that, as a seminarist tells us, "no student would have dreamt of entering his room without knocking, and everyone regarded it as an honour to hear him say: 'Come and have a smoke.'"

God, moreover, blessed his studies abundantly. "God be praised!" he would say joyfully, "things are getting on much better now than when I was at Latin." Nor was his progress in knowledge any hindrance to his growth in holiness.

"I, who knew him in both seminaries," one witness declares, "can testify that he was a real model of piety, and that his humility was remarkable."—"His fervour," says another, "ran through and sanctified his whole day. He began early. For five years I tried in

vain to get down before him in the morning to the chapel; but I never succeeded. His devotion in the chapel edified us all. His modesty in going about the house reminded us of the angelic Aloysius Gonzaga, of whom we are told that his fellow-students in the Roman College would leave their rooms expressly to see him pass." A third witness gives us a fuller portrait: "Peter Donders," he says, "was such a beautiful soul that never did I see, or even imagine, a more gentle, amiable, or obedient young man. His humility, affability and kindness, as well as his wonderfully tender devotion to Our Lady, were most striking. He was, besides, a most exact observer of college rules in their smallest details. What reached its highest degree of perfection in him, however, was his humility."

According to all who lived in close contact with him, every detail in the life of this chosen soul was a source of charm and edification. One of them speaks as follows: "I did not know him in the Preparatory Seminary; but in the Theological Seminary such was his consistent fidelity to duty that we all looked on him as a saint. I can testify that I have never surprised him in the smallest fault. He was always an object of admiration to me. Not that he aimed at singularity in the slightest way; on the contrary, he took an artless and quiet pleasure in every lawful amusement of ours. His habitual gentleness and serenity simply charmed us. I never remember seeing him angry, or even put out. He was always master of himself." These words are all the more weighty coming, as they do, from one who had an excellent opportunity of observing him closely, as he had his saintly friend constantly under his eyes for many years.

"We shared the one room," he goes on. "Now one morning, having entered it first, I was amazed to find the whole floor swimming with water. What had happened? Some practical jokers amongst the students had taken it into their heads to lay a huge block of ice on the table, near the fire. At the sight, I got purple with rage. 'Look at this,' I said to Peter, who had just come in, 'look at this dirty trick they have played

on us!' Peter only smiled, opened the window, threw out the ice, and wiped the floor with a cloth. He then sat down to his books with me without having uttered a word. As I was his junior, I was in a way bound to obey him. However, I could never succeed in doing him the smallest service, though it was my duty to help him. I think he used to do up our room himself early in the morning. With the utmost humility, he was always ready to assist me in any way. He had a very noble and generous nature, and was always most grateful."

And this testimony is confirmed by all, without exception, who had anything to do with him. All were witnesses of the unfailing splendour of his virtues, and are at one in doing homage to them. "We felt full of affection and regard for him," they declare. "We looked on him as a saint . . . never did we meet with anyone more lovable, more humble and more pious."

Nor, as we have said, was there anything singular about this piety of his. The wholeheartedness he brought to his prayers and his books he brought to recreation. The moment the bell rang for a walk, Peter was standing ready; when the same bell rang for recreation, he could at once be seen making for the room where it was held. There was, moreover, nothing odd or affected about him.

His lively faith also, showing itself in every detail of his conduct, struck everybody. It sometimes happened that the preaching at the elocution class gave rise to considerable merriment amongst the students. But when *Mr. Donders'* turn came, not only was there no laughing heard, but the earnestness and conviction with which he spoke commanded respect and even awakened emotion.

Each time the holidays came round, Peter's virtues seemed, in the eyes of his own townsfolk, to shine with a new splendour. What struck them most of all was his unwearying spirit of prayer. A young girl in Tilburg, who afterwards became a Poor Clare in Antwerp, used to tell how the Servant of God was wont to spend the whole forenoon in the church, from the

earliest possible hour until noon. Her mother often told her to ask him in to take something, as otherwise he would have remained fasting until dinner. His attitude during those long hours was most edifying.

"I could not take my eyes off him," another witness declares. "More than once, I went over and knelt close to him, as I wanted to observe his posture and to see how he prayed. He knelt the whole time, and without leaning against the bench, at least as far as I could make out. He remained motionless, with his palms joined. He rarely used a book."

Besides the parish church, there was another sanctuary that had an attraction for him—a chapel dedicated to Our Lady, in which she had been long honoured in a special way. "Many a time," a witness states, "I saw him pass my father's house on his way to this chapel, which was not far from where we lived. Whenever I missed him going by, the servant or my mother would tell me, as they knew how anxious I was to see him. Usually an hour, or even more, went by before he returned, and we used to wonder how many rosaries he could have said in the meantime. Moreover, our servant, who lived near him, had all sorts of edifying stories to tell about him, and she could never be reconciled to see him dress so shabbily, since, as she would say, 'he was now wearing the clerical hat.'"

Thus did his years of training go by, full years for him, spent in work and edification, in fervour and regularity, the holy monotony of which was scarcely broken by a single noteworthy incident. One such incident there is, however, which occurred during his second year, of such importance that it must be regarded as having had a decisive influence both on his spiritual life and on his apostolic career.

As we have seen, God had enkindled early in the soul of the youthful levite an ardent longing for the foreign missions. His friend and father, Professor Van Someren, nursed this sacred fire; but noticing that the thoughts of his young protégé were turning in the direction of North America, he drew his attention to

INTERIOR OF SURINAM

the great dearth of priests in the Western Dutch colonies at that time. He thought it but fair that Peter should give these regions the preference. "At any rate," he said to him, "if you have no serious objection, you might have a chat with Mgr. Grooff, the Prefect Apostolic of the colony, who is expected amongst us shortly."[1]

Now at this particular time, nothing was talked of throughout Catholic Holland but the exalted virtues and apostolic zeal of this missionary. Early in 1839 he was given an enthusiastic reception in Herlaar. It was on this occasion that Peter opened his mind to the zealous prelate and sought information concerning his mission in Guiana. Thereupon the Prefect gave him the following outline of its history, as well as of the growth of the Catholic religion in Surinam:

As far back as 1683, two Franciscan Fathers of Louvain, in defiance of the law passed by the Calvinistic States of Zealand, prohibiting the public exercise of the Catholic Faith, had settled in Paramaribo, where they were joined by another Father and a Brother. Alas! after three years devoted to their ministry, these generous pioneers, worn out by labours and privations, died at their post, leaving their mission without a priest for a whole century. After this long break, eleven more priests left their country at various intervals to water this distant vineyard with the sweat of their brow; but some of these succumbed to sickness and want, while the rest were compelled to return home. At last God's hour struck. In 1817, Fathers Wennekers and Van der Horst, the two real founders of the mission, landed in Surinam. Great were the difficulties with which they had to contend: difficulties from the

[1] James Grooff was born in Amsterdam on the 3rd August, 1800, and was ordained priest on the 19th August, 1825. He landed at Paramaribo on the 8th February, 1826, with Father Van der Weyden, whom he succeeded, the following year, as Prefect Apostolic of Surinam. This eminent man was remarkable for his extraordinary zeal for souls and his tender affection for the lepers. His activity was equalled only by his sufferings.

Protestants; difficulties from the Catholics, and particularly from certain members of the Church Building Committee, who laid claim to authority in matters ecclesiastical and spared the missionaries neither insult nor injury, even going the incredible length of beating Father Wennekers. Even the Government made things hard for them and hampered their work. In defiance of liberty of conscience, fifty thousand slaves were systematically withdrawn from the influence of their apostolic zeal. Amongst the Europeans—Dutch and others—corruption was so rampant that, according to Father Wennekers, "chastity was unknown in the country," and vague notions of good and evil were as much as the coloured races possessed. To crown all, a fire, which destroyed part of the town, did not spare the Catholic church, and used up the sum of 2,500 florins. In spite of all, the missionaries never lost heart, but put their trust in God. They met every onslaught with invincible patience, and it was acknowledged on all hands—by Catholics and non-Catholics alike—that Father Wennekers was the first to introduce respect for the sanctity of marriage into the colony, and to make bad men ashamed of themselves. These missionaries did not, indeed, succeed in accomplishing very much; but on the foundations they laid, their successor, Father Van der Weyden, raised a structure that stands to our own day. Father Grooff, who landed with Father Van der Weyden, was destined to succeed him before long, as that stout-hearted apostle, worn out by hardship, was a dying man eight months later. Ever since, the work and worry of the mission had proved a crushing burden for the Prefect Apostolic. Now, however, thank God, the outlook was promising. At first, both the Government and the enemies of the Church had been a source of much annoyance. Thus, for instance, while the Moravian Brothers were everywhere and in every way favoured, and had been given free access both to the State employees and to the lepers, he had met with nothing but frigid refusals in reply to his oft-renewed petitions. Again, these same Moravian Brothers were substantially subsidized by the *Pro-*

testantsche Maatschappij.[1] All the same, the Prefect never lost heart, and putting his confidence in God, resolutely pushed on with the work. Its first-fruits appeared in 1830, when he succeeded in having the care of the lepers in Batavia entrusted to him. He began by building a hut, then a church and presbytery, and this spot of earth he called his "pleasure-garden." In 1832 a law was promulgated granting Catholics full liberty to evangelize and baptize slaves, and the regular visitation of the plantations was at once set on foot.

"You see, then, my young friend," the Prefect remarked as he concluded, "what a truly magnificent field lies open for the missionary whose heart is afire with love for God and souls."

All the while, as the prelate was speaking, Peter felt within him an unbounded commiseration for the neglected souls of that far-off land, where the harvest was so great and the labourers so few, and listening only to the dictates of his noble heart, he offered himself there and then for the Surinam mission. He was accepted on the spot. Meanwhile, he had to resign himself to wait until he should have completed his theological studies in his own country, and had been raised to the priesthood.

He was beaming as he issued from the Prefect's room. All who saw him then felt sure that he would one day be a zealous and holy missionary in Guiana. And the Prefect Apostolic unhesitatingly thought so, too. Those about him heard him remark: "That young man will become a zealous apostle and convert many souls." The sequel was to prove him right, and the Prefect himself, on his return to Europe many years later, was to bear testimony to the truth of his words and to proclaim aloud, everywhere he went, the virtues of his missionary.

From that day the thoughts of the fervent seminarist often winged their way to that distant sun-parched clime, and the memory of those forsaken multitudes, whose pitiful state the Prefect had so harrowingly described, kept haunting his mind and tugging at his

[1] A Protestant society founded at The Hague in 1825.

heart-strings. "He would often speak of Surinam to me," one of his fellow-students tells us; "it was his favourite topic, and he would tell me of his great longing to go there and convert the pagans."

Meanwhile, as the seminary in Herlaar had become too small to house the growing numbers of the students, the building of a new one was deemed indispensable. In the year 1839, this arose on the main road connecting Bois le Duc with Tilburg, and, on the 16th July, Peter Donders and his class-mates moved into it.

In this holy house the spiritual life of the young levite developed as the days went by. Besides, each new step he took towards the sanctuary lent him an added dignity and brought down fresh graces upon him. He received the tonsure on the 26th April, 1840, and minor orders, as well as the subdiaconate, in the private oratory of Cardinal Sterckx in Malines. A year later, on Saturday in Easter Week, the 10th April, 1841, Mgr. Van Wijckerslooth, the titular Bishop of Curium, conferred the diaconate upon him in the private oratory of his country-house at Duinzicht, and, barely two months later, on the 5th June, 1841, on Saturday in Ember Week, the same prelate, the Procurator of the mission in Surinam, raised him to the priesthood. All that passed in the heart of the young priest on that day God alone can tell. In his *curriculum vitæ*,[1] Peter himself writes these words—few but full of meaning: "In 1841 I was ordained priest, through the goodness and mercy of God." From all that has gone before, the reader will easily gather what deep humility and grateful love these simple lines disclose. Besides, we are not wholly without authentic information on the point.

An eyewitness speaks thus: "The day we left the Archbishop's palace in Malines, after receiving the subdiaconate—I can see it all still—Peter Donders

[1] *Curriculum vitæ*: According to a Constitution that goes back to the days of St. Alphonsus himself, the Redemptorist novice must write a brief account of his vocation, describing the ways and means by which God drew him into the Congregation.—Tr.

remarked to me with a look of heavenly joy: 'All my earthly desires have now been satisfied, since it has pleased the infinite goodness of God to admit me, in spite of my unworthiness, into the ranks of His ministers at the altar.' As he spoke, he burst into tears."

If the Servant of God, then, experienced such fullness of joy when he took the first step that led him to the priesthood, what transports must have been his on that day when, after all his weary waiting, he was at last able to say: "I am a priest for ever!"

Thenceforward, in every detail of his daily life, his soul would shine with a more resplendent beauty, and leave behind memories whose fragrance would never die. So much so that, when Father Augustine William Hooremans, a parish priest in Amsterdam, heard the news of his death forty years later, he remarked: "I met that man just once in my life, on the day I was ordained with him, at Oegstgeest; but the impression of holiness he then made on me I have never since forgotten."

CHAPTER IV

LAST YEAR IN HOLLAND

1841-1842

It would have been a great joy for Father Donders had he been able to leave for his distant mission immediately after his elevation to the priesthood; but, as there was no ship sailing for Guiana in the year 1841, he had to wait patiently a whole twelvemonth before attaining the object of his desires.

In the seminary, where he lived in the meantime, he was the same mortified and charitable soul we already know, ever pressing eagerly up the slopes that led to the summit of divine love. If the details that have come down to us concerning this period of his life are meagre, they are characteristic, at any rate, and worth recording.

His townsman, Norbert Donders, when seventy-one years of age, could still recall the deep piety with which the young priest celebrated the Sacred Mysteries. "Every time," he says, "I saw him approach the altar, I was struck by the expression on his countenance, on which there was an indefinable blend of gravity, reverence, expectation and holy joy. Throughout the Holy Sacrifice, his recollection was extraordinary. His visible emotion attracted me; it did me good to serve his Mass, and many a time I requested my companions to forgo their turn in my favour. The wholesome influence I underwent on such days lasted until nightfall. I loved to talk about him, either with the servant, who knew him well, or with my mother, who was greatly edified by

his recollection and modesty. On one occasion, when he was assisting a young priest at his First Mass, it was Father Donders himself who engaged my attention. I never remember his behaviour at the altar to have been anything but faultless, and it inspired me with the resolution to discharge my duties as altar-boy with greater reverence."

Twice during this period the Servant of God preached in his parish church. "I heard Father Donders preach two sermons for us," the same witness declares. "To be candid, he was not much of an orator, but he put his whole heart into whatever he said. His words made their way into the very depths of our souls. What proves this is that his preaching was talked about for quite a long time afterwards in his native town."

In June, 1842, he was told by Bishop Van Wijckerslooth, the Procurator of the mission, to make ready for the journey. On the 15th of that month, he said goodbye to the President of the seminary and to the Professors, "those good Fathers who took care of me as God Himself would have done." He took leave of the students also, and made a compact with certain young priests, on that occasion, that they would recommend one another to Our Blessed Lady every Sunday, that they might obtain, through her maternal intercession, the grace to lead a truly priestly life.

He then went to Tilburg to bid farewell to his relatives and friends. On Sunday, in the village church, which was crowded for the occasion, he preached at the High Mass on the value of the soul. His touching words were listened to with rapt attention; and when he recommended himself and his beloved mission to the prayers of the congregation, all with one voice solemnly promised them aloud. Tears were shed when the preacher expressed his heartfelt gratitude to his friend and benefactor the parish priest. For a long time to come, his apostolic words were often fondly recalled.

Another townsman of his, named Gerard Tudor, could remember, many years after, how the missionary,

before leaving his native Tilburg, had begged most earnestly for the prayers of the children. These dear little ones, he said, were most pleasing to God on account of their innocence. He distributed pictures amongst them, on which he had written these words: *Pray for Peter Donders.* The children were so fond of him that, when the time came for him to leave, they hung on to his clothes—"and so did I," the good old fellow added feelingly.

As he was anxious about his brother's welfare, he would not leave until he had made quite sure that his future was secure. When the old home had been pulled down, Martin had got good employment as a skilled workman in the town. His employer's daughter, then a little girl of nine, and afterwards a nun, stated that Peter felt leaving his poor invalid brother very much. "But my mother," she continues, "gave him her word that Martin would be taken good care of by us, and so, with this assurance, Peter went off happy." Even when far away across the ocean, he never lost interest in this dear brother. Besides writing affectionate letters—letters which Martin never read without tears—he used to send him home cases of oranges and preserved fruits.

At last, after bidding good-bye to his stepmother, Peter, in company with Martin, took the road to Bois le Duc, where he was to get the boat for Leyden. In that Brabantine city, a sister of Professor Van Someren very kindly put him up, and there, as elsewhere, he spread the good odour of Jesus Christ.

"I saw him during the last days he spent in Holland before leaving for Surinam," this lady writes, "and I still retain very vivid recollections of him. He was of middle height, pale and frail-looking. His great modesty and affability won all hearts."

But now a fresh difficulty arose. His ship was weatherbound, and as sailing was again delayed, the brothers returned to Tilburg. However, Bishop Van Wijckerslooth sent him word to come and stay with him in Oegstgeest, and so Martin took definite leave of his eldest brother at Bois le Duc, whither he had again

accompanied him, this time Professor Van Someren being of the party.

"I set off, then, all alone," Peter writes. "At last my bonds were broken and I threw myself unreservedly on God. Oh, how delightful was my experience of His kindness and solicitude for those who trust in Him and are willing to leave all things for His love!"

With the consent of his Bishop, Father Donders filled in the time by giving a helping hand to the priest of the neighbouring parish of Warmond. For three weeks he was thus enabled to give free scope to his zeal, and, as he put it, "to get some little experience."

In a letter of his, the simple life he led in this country presbytery is outlined as follows:

"The parish priest," he writes, "a God-fearing and virtuous man, would like to have for curate some pious priest with whom he could live on terms of mutual intimacy and brotherly affection. In his parish he allows no visits except to the sick and the Professors in the seminary. In this he is but following out his own supernatural views concerning the perfection to which our state commits us. You need not gather from this that I remain shut up in the house all day. Besides having a garden, the parish priest is the proprietor of an adjoining wood, in which there is plenty of room to walk about. We see a good deal of each other. Perfect order reigns in the presbytery, and the servants are very kind. The parish priest says his Mass at half-past seven. On weekdays I follow on, but on Sundays and feast days, to spare him—as he is not strong—I sing the ten o'clock Mass. We have breakfast together and a smoke. We dine at twelve and then take a little recreation. At two, I take a stroll in the garden for as long a time as I like. We have tea at four, and then we separate. We meet again at eight and say Matins and Lauds together; then follows supper, after which we say night prayers with the servants.

"As the parish is not very large—there are scarcely four hundred sacrament-going people in it—confessions are not very heavy. Four times a week I teach

Catechism: on Sundays for the whole hour before Vespers, which I then sing. I give two hours to it on Wednesdays: one in the morning, the other after dinner. I also give an hour to it on Friday morning. On Sundays I sometimes preach a sermon, sometimes a homily, and all this gives me plenty to do and means a good deal of head work.

"I feel quite happy. There is no lack of occupation, and the parish priest is a delightful character. I am picking up a lot from him. This was the aim of divine Providence in bringing me here before I should reach my definite sphere of action."

Short as was Father Donders' stay in Warmond, it was long enough to keep his light from being hidden under a bushel. That light shone out around him, and long afterwards old men belonging to the parish still recalled with pleasure how the young priest "was fired with zeal for souls, and this without any fuss or show, and how he was looked upon by everyone as exceptionally pious." They spoke highly of his great modesty of the eyes. On the occasion of his farewell visit to a family in the district, three young girls, who happened to be present, were caught laughing. As soon as the priest had gone, they were asked for an explanation. "Just imagine!" they replied, "he did not even look at us. He certainly does not know the colour of our eyes."

A trifling though significant incident shows the singular esteem in which he was held after a stay of three short weeks. In 1916, a Warmond family had still in its possession a picture which the young priest had given a child in the Catechism class. Later on, it was placed by Father Smulders, the parish priest, in the episcopal museum of Harlem, where it is still religiously kept.

Not in Warmond only, but in Tilburg also, and in every place he passed through, this good man left unforgettable memories behind him. To the day of his death, the townspeople of Tilburg kept sending him stipends for Masses to support his mission, but always on the

express condition that Father Donders should say them himself, or pray for the intentions of the donors.

From Warmond he went to Amsterdam, and thence to Antwerp. In this city he went to pay his respects to Mlle. Sophie Gillès de Pélichy, a benefactress of his mission. To the very hour of his departure he was to learn the lesson, familiar to all Christian souls, that there is no earthly joy without its drop of bitterness. He left no stone unturned, in the wealthy city of Amsterdam, to procure a chalice for the journey. He failed to get one, and thus he had to forgo the consolation of offering the Holy Sacrifice throughout the long voyage. Only those who have had the happiness of saying Mass at sea can realize all that meant. While the ship cleaves the waste of heaving waters, the priest, separated from the abyss by a few planks or a steel plate, stands before his portable altar, erected in his narrow cabin, and, by the power of his words, brings down that God Who fills the heavens and the earth. Within his hands and before his eyes, he holds the Almighty Who commands the winds and the waves and inspires His minister with trust as He whispers: *It is I, fear not.*

"It was on the 31st July," writes Peter to Father Van Someren, "that I left Amsterdam for Helder, where, on the evening of the same day, the parish priest gave me a most warm welcome. I was sure, at the time, that I should be able to write to you. But God, Who does all things well, did not afford me the opportunity. I happened to be in the church the following morning, when, quite unexpectedly, I was informed that we were about to sail. Without delaying to say Mass—for after all, it was God Who was calling me—I left the church as fast as I could and rushed aboard, renewing the while my act of abandonment to divine Providence. On the 1st August, the feast of St. Peter's Chains, we went through the Straits. I still fondly recall the coincidence.

"The voyage itself was not very interesting. Though we were never in real danger, still the dead

calm and the contrary winds delayed us a good deal. Our ship—belonging to the Rothuis Company of Amsterdam—was a large fast-sailing vessel. There were eight passengers in all—two of whom were Lutherans, and three Calvinists; the rest, including Captain Van Medevoort, were Catholics. It would have been a great consolation to have been able to say Mass, at least occasionally, during such a lengthy voyage, especially as Mgr. Ferrieri had so kindly granted me the faculties; but I had no chalice. Besides, I realized that it would have been no easy matter to save the Sacred Mysteries from profanation on the part of the heretics on board, and I saw clearly that my fruitless efforts in Amsterdam were after all but a wise disposition on the part of divine Providence. I tried to make up for this deprivation by an increase of spiritual fervour, and what sweetness did I not experience in reciting the *Ave Maris Stella* on the bosom of that mighty ocean, especially on the feasts of Our Lady's Assumption and Nativity! I found much comfort, too, in throwing myself into the arms of that fatherly Providence Who had deigned to call me to His service.

"Many a time, as I watched my travelling-companions, I felt pity for them. There they were, daring and doing everything to amass perishable goods, and, alas! casting but little thought on God and their souls. Their conduct was a stimulus to me to be at least as zealous for God's glory and for the salvation of my neighbour as those poor creatures were in the pursuit of what would be a source of unhappiness both in time and in eternity; for it is an undoubted fact that, at present, fortunes are no longer as easily made in the colony as formerly—which, it seems to me, is something to thank God for."

Thus he spent the forty-six long days the voyage lasted, dividing his time between meditation and prayer, and his heart between longing to see the end of his journey and resignation in bearing with its tediousness.

This resignation Mgr. Grooff and his staff were called upon to share in no small measure. So impatient, indeed, was the Prefect Apostolic to see him land, that he seems to have been especially enlightened by God concerning the priest he was awaiting, and all his coming was to mean for the mission in the colony. Each time the arrival of a vessel was announced, he became feverish with excitement. In a letter to Bishop Van Wijckerslooth, his spiritual director, he records his alternating hopes and disappointments.

"This morning, the 15th June, 1842," he writes, "we were told that Captain Andersen was coming up the river. The flag was already floating from the tower, the finishing touches had been put to the decorations of the altar, the church doors had been thrown wide open, and I was standing at the entrance to the sanctuary, ready to welcome Father Donders. Thrilled with the same joyous expectancy, Fathers Janssen and Kempkes had gone to the riverside to greet him. Alas! instead of hearing the bells ring out, I had to suffer a cruel disappointment. The *Sophia* had indeed put her passengers ashore, but there was no Father Donders amongst them! How annoying! I can only hope to have the pleasure of welcoming him soon, together with Captain Medevoort, who will, at long last, set our minds at rest."

Many times more his fond hopes were doomed to be frustrated, and many more ships put into port without the looked-for traveller making his appearance. It was a succession of hopes and disappointments.

At last, on the 16th September, the vessel that bore the long-awaited missionary came up stream and anchored before the town.

In a letter to Professor Van Someren, Father Donders describes his reception and his impressions.

"At last the day came when I was able to change my habitation and step on land. We had scarcely let go the anchor when I saw the Prefect come aboard—

and oh, with what joy!—expressly to greet me. As soon as he had welcomed me, he took me to the church to give thanks to God.

"Your Reverence will readily understand the joy and deep emotion that were mine. At last, then, I was where God wanted me to be, and at once I looked on that land, which was so new to me, as the House of the Lord.

"Followed by a crowd of people of every colour, we started off for the church; the faithful escorting us and saying the Rosary. The bells rang out as we drew near. When we reached the entrance, I put on a white stole, and the Prefect handed me holy water, and then we both entered the sanctuary, accompanied by Fathers Janssen and Kempkes. When we reached the foot of the altar, the Prefect blessed me with the Most Holy Sacrament; the *Te Deum* was intoned in thanksgiving for so many graces, and, finally, I received the warmest congratulations from my father and brethren in Christ, as well as from the people.

"Here I am, then," he concludes, "at my journey's end, here where the Lord willed that I should be, and where His right hand has eventually led me. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.* Already I feel that what Our Saviour promised in His Holy Gospel has been realized in my case: *Everyone that hath left . . . brethren, or father, or mother . . . for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold.* In the seminary and elsewhere, I left behind me spiritual fathers and true friends; but He Whose promises never fail has given them back to me."

Here I am where the Lord willed that I should be, and where His right hand has eventually led me. Admirable words these. He turns his grateful eyes to God, Whose strong hand has led him through the long labyrinth of the past, in which everything seemed to conspire against his reaching the goal he had so yearned for, and for which he had hoped against all hope. "In spite of everything," he would often say,

"I never gave up hope that a priest I should one day be."

And the past was his warrant for the future. That future now opened out before him, bright with fresh hopes that were likewise destined to be fulfilled. His great soul looked out upon it with serenity and joy, sure that the Master on Whom alone he leant would bear him up in the work He had marked out for him to do. And what was that work to be? For wellnigh half a century—for forty-four years, to be precise—he would toil for the conversion of Surinam: at the cost of hardship and weariness untold, he would turn the light of the Gospel on the untutored intellect of slave and redskin; and then, with superhuman self-renunciation, he would devote himself, body and soul, to comforting and saving the hapless leper.

Such was his mission, as he dimly foresaw it. It would grow clearer to his eyes as the days went by; he would spend himself in it with a generosity that would never tire, strong in his trust in that Master Who not only would never fail him in his formidable task, but would, moreover, enable him to rise, step by step, to the loftiest altitudes of priestly and religious perfection.

CHAPTER V

A PRIEST IN PARAMARIBO

1842-1856

BEFORE taking up the story of Father Donders' manifold activities during the forty-four years he spent in Surinam, it will not be amiss to take a glance at that country, so little known to Europeans, which was the scene of his heroic deeds. Surinam forms part of that section of the South American coast called Guiana. The western portion of this immense seaboard belongs to Venezuela; the eastern portion to Brazil; and the region that lies between is Guiana proper, parcelled out between England, France and the Low Countries. Dutch Guiana, or Surinam, is separated from English Guiana by the Corentyne, and from French Guiana by the Maroni. It is washed to the north by the waters of the Atlantic, and bounded on the south by the giant Tumac Humac mountains. Down from these heights come the great watercourses: the Surinam, the Commewijne and the Saramacca. The country is intersected by numerous navigable rivers and lesser streams. At the time of our story, the whole transportation in the interior of the colony was effected by water. A railway has since been constructed.

Writing to his Provincial in 1869, the Dutch Redemptorist, Bishop Swinkels, says: "Seen from the sea, Surinam presents a dull unvaried appearance. The traveller sees nothing but a dark broad belt of surf-beaten coast. A closer view, however, reveals trees in countless rows, the nearest of these washed by

the tide, while those behind stretch back as far as the eye can see, covering the face of the land as with one mighty forest. Here and there this forest is broken by large tracts of beautiful prairie, where the buffalo, the deer and other animals graze unmolested; and it is traversed by countless streams, including six fine rivers abounding in fish. Numerous plantations, looking like gloomy country-seats, are also to be met with. Throughout its entire extent, the colony has but a single town—Paramaribo—and two large villages —Nickerie, or New Rotterdam, and Coronie; the former situated on the frontier between Surinam and English Guiana, the latter, consisting of a succession of plantations strung out for about fifteen miles along the coast, lying half-way between Nickerie and Paramaribo."

A letter which Father Donders wrote to Father Van Someren after he had been three years in the country, tells us how it looked to him. Though begun on the 8th September, 1846, the letter suffered more than one interruption, and was not actually finished until the 5th of the following December.

"Would you like," he writes, "to have a rough outline of what this colony of ours is like? Imagine, then, a vast forest, just as it came from the Creator's hands: *Ipse dixit et facta sunt*—a forest stretching coastwise for a distance of more than one hundred and eighty miles, with a depth, in the direction of the Tumac Humac mountains, which I have never heard stated precisely. Imagine a forest consisting of every species of tree—species beyond all reckoning—and alive with every species of wild beast—tigers, monkeys, etc.—including an enormous number of snakes, most of them poisonous. Lastly, imagine this immeasurable virgin forest intersected by rivers and streams alive, not only with fish of many kinds, but also with crocodiles and sharks.

"Though most fertile, a relatively small part of this country is under cultivation, as, up to the present, none but slaves have been employed on the land. Outside the town, which contains but few residences and looks

as though it were buried in the depths of the forest, there are numerous plantations."

The Prefect Apostolic was evidently anxious to initiate his new fellow-labourer personally into his ministry in the colony, for Father Donders sang Mass on the Sunday following his arrival, and after one day's rest. Mgr. Grooff, taking for his text: *Going therefore teach ye all nations*, preached the sermon, "in the course of which," writes Father Donders himself, "he urged me to help him to carry his cross, which he called his 'iron cross.'"

During the next few days, the newcomer made the acquaintance of his flock in Paramaribo, and began to learn their ways and customs. He had not seen much of the townspeople—white and coloured races, Dutch, Germans, Portuguese, English, Americans, Chinese and others—before realizing how disastrous it was for Catholics to live in a promiscuous community of pagans, Jews, Protestants, and Moravian Brothers. The grave detriment to their Faith that arose from this commingling of creeds, and from the dearth of priests, was not lost upon him, and his sadness grew at the sight of the deplorable immorality, which in many cases was absolutely degrading.

"Everything here," he writes to the same correspondent, "makes for corruption. Nobody thinks of stemming the rising tide of immorality. Irreligion is sweeping all before it. While idolatry is officially proscribed, in practice it is tolerated. Authorities wink at it, so as not to have to come down on the many big folk who are given up to it. We must not be surprised, then, if God periodically punishes such godlessness and licence."

Father Donders had not been three weeks in the country when the Prefect Apostolic began to think of bringing him into another field of action, viz., the leper colony.

On the banks of the Coppename—one of the finest

rivers in the country—lies a great shell-strewn plain, thickly planted with palm-trees, which bears the name of Batavia. Thither the Government had all the lepers of the colony transported. The Board of Health had been confronted with a serious and delicate problem, and, much to its regret, had been compelled to adopt the sternest measures. Since the poor sufferers would not consent to being isolated, there was nothing for it but to deport them, as their presence in the town was a standing danger. Now, it was here that the Prefect Apostolic had for many years been devoting himself to the spiritual and temporal welfare of these hapless beings. He had built a pretty chapel, over which he lived. Behind this chapel was the cemetery, planted with palm-trees, and, in front, a walk lined with orange-trees led down to the river. A glorious view of the sea, dotted with coasting-vessels, can be enjoyed by the spectator as he looks across the mouth of the Coppename.

A few months later, in a letter to Professor Van Someren, Father Donders describes what he then saw, and his words are equally eloquent of the liveliness of his faith and of his self-sacrificing charity. He writes:

"We left by boat—Most Reverend Father and myself—on the 7th October, for Batavia, his favourite spot, which we reached on the evening of the 8th. I must tell you something about it, especially as I am delighted with everything here.

"As we drew near the colony, the Prefect Apostolic heralded our arrival by firing three shots. The lepers at once replied by tolling the chapel bell, and I soon saw them making for the shore to meet us. When I beheld them, I could scarcely restrain my tears; but my emotion grew when the Prefect, with dimmed eyes, pointed out to me a cross planted by the water's edge. It was there that Most Reverend Father Grooff's predecessor, the Prefect Apostolic Van der Weyden, of holy memory, landed for the first time. On that very spot arose a tree, used for idolatrous purposes, which

he cut down and replaced by the sacred symbol of our Redemption.

" Farther on, on the river's bank, I noticed a little chapel dedicated to Our Lady, and containing a statue with the inscription: *Salus Infirmorum.* Between the cross and the chapel—a monument to Mgr. Grooff's untiring zeal—arose the church, a handsome wooden structure, resembling the churches in the town, and dedicated to St. Roch.

" We came to anchor and stepped ashore. The lepers greeted us with repeated cries of: *Odi, vadri!* which means in their patois: Good day, Father. When the Prefect had given them his blessing, we proceeded to the church, followed by the lepers chanting the *Our Father*; then, when we had returned thanks to God, we took a little rest. I got the altar ready—the gift of Mlle. Gillès of Antwerp—for the morning's Mass—it was Sunday—and I did my best at it, as it was the Prefect's wish that I should inaugurate my priestly ministry by singing Mass. Next morning, I ascended the altar at nine o'clock, exposed the Blessed Sacrament and began the Holy Sacrifice, the lepers singing hymns in chorus, alternately in Latin and patois, which they speak fluently and which is called *Nigger English.*[1]

" It was a heartrending sight. Some of them had lost their toes, others their fingers, which had been completely eaten away. Some had no nose; others were blind; others had their legs horribly swollen; in some cases the tongue had been attacked and could no longer articulate. However, no matter what progress the disease has made, and no matter how badly they are

[1] *Nigger English,* or English corrupted by the Negroes, is the dialect spoken by the people in Surinam. It is used everywhere in the pulpit, except in the Cathedral of Paramaribo, where all sermons are in Dutch. A specimen of this patois may be of interest. Here is the *Our Father: Wi Tata, disi dee na hemel, Joe nem moesoe dee santa, Joe kondre moesoe kom, Joe wanni moesoe dee na grontappoe soleki na hemel. Gi wi tidei wi deibredde. En gi wi pardon joe wi paiman, soleki wi gi pardon toe na den, disi meki paiman na wi. En no tjari wi na ini tesi. Ma loesoe wi joe da ogri. Amen.*—Tr.

able to walk, they hobble along to the church, morning and evening, to say their prayers together or to hear Mass.

"With the exception of a handful of the white population, who were free, these poor wretches had been living and working as slaves on the plantations. But no sooner had the dread disease declared itself than they were brought here. The only accommodation afforded them are miserable huts roofed in with branches and straws, and, within, more like stables than dwelling-houses. The Government subsidy for their keep is nugatory and entirely inadequate.

"And yet, how good God is, and how fatherly His Providence! Their very affliction is really the only means of salvation for most of them. How many are there not who come to know and adore the One true God here who, had they their health, would never have known or loved Him! How many are given a splendid chance of atoning for their sins and winning heaven by their patience! Besides, in the Prefect Apostolic they have a father who, not satisfied with comforting their souls, spends himself assiduously in the service of their racked and broken bodies, and, through the charity of certain people in Holland and elsewhere, finds means of relieving their pains in all sorts of ways. Him they have to thank for their pretty chapel and the beautiful cemetery adjoining. Now it must be admitted that it was precisely when he was without human hope, and bereft of all resource, that he undertook all this work, which, in this country, entailed a great outlay.

"He could in all truth have told these afflicted creatures that he gave his life for them. Having come here in a crazy ship to announce the Word of God and administer the Sacraments, he spent ten years of his life in one of these dreadful huts and said Mass under the open sky. Certainly it would be hard to appraise such zeal, such devotedness and self-sacrifice for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. And so I look upon myself as fortunate in having such a zealous man as father, and I pray that God, in His goodness,

will not deny me the grace of living with him for many a long day. I shall pick up a great deal from him, and shall profit by his twenty years' experience, for in these regions especially is Our Lord's warning applicable: *Be ye wise as serpents.*

"Three times a week a beautiful ceremony takes place here. After night prayers, which are followed by the Rosary, the priest, preceded by the cross, goes from the church to Our Lady's chapel, skirting the river; the lepers follow in processional order, singing the *Our Father* or some hymn. As soon as the procession has come up, the bell is rung, to let those know who were unable to walk and had to remain in the church, and to invite them to join in spirit in the common prayers. When he has blessed them with holy water and incensed Our Lady's statue, the priest, going on his knees with the whole congregation, recites aloud five *Our Fathers* and five *Hail Marys* for the extirpation of idolatry and immorality, the twin evils of the colony. Then all return to the church, singing as they go. I was deeply moved when I assisted at this ceremony for the first time. Picture the scene: night-time by a river bank, in a moonlit solitude; a priest vested in surplice and stole, following the Saviour's cross, and followed in turn by that multitude of the faithful of every age and sex, stricken one and all with the same hideous disease. Picture them honouring Our Lady by their prayers and hymns, after having been so long slaves to the worst of vices. Oh, may this good Mother deign to give ear to their supplications!

"In this land of sorrows, which for all that is a land of consolations, I experienced the joy of baptizing three children and two old men, and of giving three old women and a little girl the Bread of Angels for the first time, on the occasion of a festival. This latter, a child of eleven, is already stricken and destined for an early grave. After Mass, I married two poor creatures who had practically no fingers left.

"On the 26th October, we left that spot where the mercy of the Lord is made so manifest. A Government vessel is bringing us back to the town. Alas! the

good-byes amongst these poor people are not gone through without many tears."

The young missionary had not been well landed, then, before he had shown his mettle and his tact on two fields—in Batavia and in Paramaribo. That he might complete his experience of missionary activity in Surinam, his father and friend, Mgr. Grooff, set him to work in a third field, viz., on the plantations. Here again we will let Father Donders describe things.

"On our way back by boat from Batavia to Paramaribo," he writes, "we landed at a plantation in order to catechize the slaves, some of whom had already been baptized. We go there regularly on one Sunday in each month to give religious instruction; each journey costs us forty florins.

"The eagerness these good folk show to hear me, and the attention with which they listen, are most edifying. Their employer, who has left them perfectly free to receive instruction, is here at present. Although a Protestant, and, if report be true not at all in sympathy with our work of late, yet he is very friendly and gives us to understand that eventually all his slaves will become Catholics. He assures us, moreover, that this is just what he should wish himself, as he does not at all like to see them going to the school of the Moravian Brothers.

"On leaving that place, we ran aground in the channel, as there was no water. It was the dry season. You must know that we have four seasons here: the short and the long dry season, and the short and the long rainy season. We forged ahead, then, as well as we could, in a canoe, or *coriâl*, along channels that were wellnigh innavigable. At last, as the waters rose, we got home the following Saturday night at ten o'clock. On the way back I was shown a huge tree that was made the object of an idolatrous cult on the part of the Indians, and to which they offer the eggs laid by their hens. I felt my heart bleed for them, and I begged God to deign to scatter the dark-

ness of these poor creatures. And now you have some notion of my first journey in the colony."

As soon as he got back to Paramaribo, Father Donders preached his first sermon, on the 31st October. His choice of a subject shows us anew the trend of his thoughts, as well as the holy passion that consumed him for the salvation of his brethren. For the next fourteen years he was to devote the most of his time and the best of his energies to parish work in Paramaribo. We learn something of one feature of his life at this period from the personal recollections of an eyewitness, the young John Marius Mehcis.

"I was thirteen," he says, "when I received baptism at the hands of the Servant of God, and I knew him from that day until the day he left for Batavia. I saw him say Mass at seven every morning in the church, which he had already reached long before me. After a quarter of an hour's thanksgiving, he went and took a cup of coffee, and then, at eight, taught school to the boys and girls. The first half of the time he devoted to prayers and Catechism; the second half to reading and writing. If I remember rightly, I went to his school for three years."

The children in the Catechism class loved to be with him, and would seek out his company. Dorothy Kustner, one of his smart pupils, who was but nine when Father Donders came to Paramaribo, speaks as follows:

"During the Catechism class, Father Schepers would often say to us: 'I'll have to take Father Donders off and send him to Batavia. You are simply abusing his kindness. We can't get a moment's peace in the house with your *Father Donders! Father Donders!*' Whenever he met us in the street, he rarely omitted saying: 'You must pray, pray, pray,' and this he did even in the case of grown-up people, too."

He would often teach his hearers, in very simple language, the best way of loving God. The carpenter, Andrew Gerling, a witness at the canonical process,

thus describes it: "Many a time I heard the Servant of God say: 'Mind what I am telling you—do the Will of God and you will obtain all you desire. I do that holy Will of God myself, and I get everything I want.'"

After giving the first hours of his day to the children—those favourites of the Divine Friend—he went through the town to visit Jesus in the person of the sick, the sinful and the unbelieving. He often made these rounds in intolerable heat. In that country the temperature is usually so high that there is no going out of doors between ten in the forenoon and four in the afternoon. Now it was precisely these hours this generous missionary chose for his pastoral rounds. "At ten o'clock," Marius Mehcis tells us, "he would take his hat and go off to visit the parishioners in the most out-of-the-way quarters."—"I am certain," adds another witness, "that there is not a spot in Paramaribo he has not explored."

To realize the full import of these words, the reader must know, first, that, at the time, Paramaribo was a more extensive city than Amsterdam at the same period; and, secondly, that, as we have just mentioned, it was against the most elementary prudence to go out in such heat, especially where newcomers were concerned.

"Father Donders," Marius Mehcis continues, "usually returned from his rounds at noon, sometimes at one, and even at two o'clock—which sometimes got him in for a good scolding from Father Schepers. Dinner was hardly over when he was off to the church to pray. He never took a siesta. If anything prevented Father Schepers from instructing the children for their First Communion at four, Father Donders took his place, after which he resumed his rounds. Sometimes he stayed indoors in the presbytery playing the harmonium. At seven he instructed the adults and spent the remainder of the day in the society of Mgr. Grooff." However, he frequently sat up chatting with his Superior till far into the night. Some years later, Bishop Schaap asked him one day: "Tell me, Father, how on earth did you become such a heavy smoker?"

—"Oh," he replied, "ever since I used to sit up late—often till midnight—with Mgr. Grooff."[1]

The following lines, penned in 1874, reveal the spirit in which he began and continued this work to the very end. "God," he writes, "Who enkindled such a burning desire to save souls in my heart, was pleased to satisfy this longing Himself by giving me plenty of work during the fourteen years I stayed in Paramaribo. He refused me neither patience nor submission to His Will in all my trials."

The young priest had not been two months in Guiana when the Prefect Apostolic, in a letter to the Procurator of the mission, dated the 14th November, 1842, spoke of his zeal in the following glowing terms: "I have not the smallest doubt but that Father Donders is going to be a source of great relief and consolation to me in the midst of my many worries. It is clearly the one wish of the young missionary to share with me both the heats of the day and the burden of the ministry." Five weeks later, writing to the same correspondent, he thus corroborates this flattering appreciation: "May God soon raise us up another Father Donders! He is a great help and a great comfort to me."

The Prefect Apostolic was soon to experience this help and comfort to an unusual degree. As a result of a serious outbreak of dysentery in the town early in the following year, he, as well as Father Janssen, were tied to a bed of pain.

"At the time I was the only priest on my feet," Father Donders tells us; "but God gave me all the health and strength and courage I needed to anoint the sick and baptize the pagans."

For three long months he brought unaided the consolations of religion to the two thousand Catholics who were then in the town; and though a novice at the work, he spent himself with a zeal that never flagged in

[1] Smoking, which is general amongst the Dutch clergy, is practically a necessity in the tropics. Besides, if Father Donders sat up so late, it was rather out of consideration for his Superior, who was a victim to insomnia.

visiting the sick, instructing the children, preaching and hearing confessions. In a word, he did everything his burning love for God and souls could suggest. And so, soon after, the Prefect Apostolic wrote thus gratefully of him: "Father Donders is well, thank God. He is always happy and good-humoured. He is very devoted to me and is simply invaluable. Honestly, I wonder how I should ever get on without him."

His Superior pays still higher tribute to his worth by comparing him to Paul Anthony Wennekers, "that most deserving Prefect of the Surinam mission, formerly the noblest and most energetic, if indeed not the most perfect personality in the whole line of the apostles of this country." The prelate refers in his letters to Father Donders' untiring ardour in the exercise of his ministry.

"Like another Wennekers, of imperishable memory, he spends himself in ceaseless toil day and night, winning all hearts as much by his example as by his multiplied activities. I say all this without wishing for a moment to depreciate in the slightest way the zeal and charity of my other assistants."

From a letter of Father Donders we learn in what light his faith made him regard the epidemic. "A scourge of God's justice," he writes, "but a scourge that has proved an instrument of His mercy, has struck us. For four long months dysentery wrought great havoc here, and claimed many victims for the grave. On some days we had as many as three or four funerals amongst our own people—for I am not counting the others: pagans, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Moravian Brothers. This calamity was a great grace for more than one; many adults and old men, and especially a number of pagan children, had the happiness of receiving baptism."

Before disappearing, the scourge carried off one chosen victim. On the 12th March, 1843, Father Janssen succumbed. "It is God's holy Will," wrote Father Donders, "and we must adore It in all things." This death, by reducing still further the already limited staff, was all the more distressing as the work grew daily.

"Now is the time," wrote the Servant of God in June, 1843, "to plant Our Saviour's Cross in every corner of the colony. The new Governor is particularly friendly. He has just proved it by leaving the Prefect quite free to come and go as he likes, and—what is better still—by assuring us that all prejudice against our work has now definitely broken down. On the 14th May last, the Prefect, at the request of the Governor, celebrated the Holy Sacrifice at Fort New Amsterdam, in presence of the garrison and the slaves. An unfortunate decision on the part of authorities had withdrawn this consoling privilege. It is now settled that henceforth one of us shall make the journey every other Sunday. The fort I speak of is on the river Surinam, about an hour's journey from the town.

"Fathers Schepers and Kempkes, who reside at Coronie, on the coast, have plenty of scope there for their energies, though the new colony also gives rise to the fairest hopes. The same may be said of Nickerie, where work is about to begin.

"I have been working in the town myself this long while, with the Prefect, and, I can assure you, there is little fear of unemployment. You can judge for yourself: an instruction to the children in the morning; an instruction to the catechumens in the evening, with crowds of confessions to boot. Not that I am losing heart; quite the reverse. I thank God for having deigned to bring about the fulfilment of my dearest dream, and for deigning to make use of me, in spite of my unworthiness, for the conversion of the unbelieving and the sinful."

Now this very mission, beset by all sorts of difficulties and handicapped by a great dearth of apostolic labourers, was to lose its Prefect, Mgr. Grooff, by his promotion to the Vicariate Apostolic of Java. It was the missionaries themselves, of course, who viewed the approaching departure of their prudent and beloved Superior with the utmost concern and distress. On the 13th January, 1843, Bishop Van Wijckerslooth wrote to Mgr. Den Dubbelden: "I want to say a word about

Father Donders. The news of the *possible* departure of the Prefect has caused consternation in that quarter. They are simply demoralized. I have received letters imploring me to move heaven and earth to avert the catastrophe. Father Janssen is talking of leaving, too, and Father Donders is beginning to wonder what he can do alone, young and inexperienced as he is, if he is going to lose his father and guide. But what can I do in the matter? I forwarded Father Janssen's letter to Rome, after having translated it. The Prefect is extremely pleased with Father Donders."

Neither the protestations of the missionaries, however, nor the active intervention of the Procurator succeeded in having the decision revoked. Higher interests made the cruel sacrifice imperative, and, in the first fortnight of October, 1843, Mgr. Grooff took ship for Europe, where the mitre was awaiting him. The Servant of God felt keenly what he spoke of as "a painful and irreparable loss." Twelve months later, he still referred to it as follows:

"I can only say it is God's holy Will. God gave him to us, God has taken him away, in spite of what it costs us. In His justice and mercy, God has chastised us, but He has not forsaken us, still less does He wish to destroy us. On the contrary, His all-powerful grace has so sustained His weak and puny creatures that we are in a position now, not only to continue the work begun by our never-to-be-forgotten father, but even to extend and develop it."

On landing in Holland, Mgr. Grooff could not say enough in praise of his saintly and invaluable fellow-labourer. In the Preparatory Seminary of *Sint Michiels-Gestel*, which had a visit from him, he took occasion, when describing the work of the Surinam mission, to speak enthusiastically of his youngest missionary. He emphasized his untiring zeal, which never spared itself, even facing the most stifling heat the moment there was question of bringing back to God a soul that had wandered from Him. His Lordship knew no rest until he had seen Father Donders' relations and told them the edifying story of their kinsman's deeds. Peter's

brother Martin lived in the neighbourhood. The prelate sent for him. We can imagine the embarrassment of the poor crippled boy as he entered the room where the Bishop was awaiting him in the midst of a number of the clergy. His Lordship, however, soon put him at his ease. Rising immediately, he went forward to meet him, embraced him warmly, and seating him by his side, had a long talk with him about his beloved brother. Shortly after, when passing through Tilburg, he drove to Peter's native town, in the hope of meeting his stepmother; but on being informed that the good woman had left the place to settle in Enschot, he at once decided on going there, and not only brought her affectionate greetings from her boy, but bore his own testimony also to the entire satisfaction which the unflagging zeal of the young apostle afforded him.

Two things emerge from all this: the kindness and nobility of the Bishop, and the extraordinary esteem and affection in which he held Father Donders. Later on, when borne over distant seas, outward-bound to the Indies, the good Bishop never forgot his dear son. With deep emotion he recalled the last words of good-bye spoken by "the Reverend and most zealous Father Donders." And when six degrees north latitude on the wide ocean, "that is to say, in exactly the same latitude as never-to-be-forgotten Surinam," he sent across the waters words of fatherly and cordial greeting to "the never-to-be-forgotten Father Schepers and the most zealous Father Donders."

Before leaving the colony, Mgr. Grooff had appointed Father Schepers Pro-Vicar, and nominated Fathers Donders and Kempkes his assistants—the former in Paramaribo, the latter at Coronie.

What a crushing burden this was for the shoulders of our hero may be gathered from a letter which he penned on the 24th September, 1844, in his usual modest tone:

"I am the Pro-Vicar's only assistant in the town. I have, moreover, the *Johanna Catharina* and the *Toledo* plantations, as well as Fort New Amsterdam, to look

PARAMARIBO

after. And yet the town alone would be more than enough to keep us both going. Last year, we baptized 200 souls here—including a few individuals on the plantations—and according to my calculations, the total for the current year will not fall below 300, as so far we have 210. And I am speaking now of baptisms only. But all it means to instruct these children and these adults, especially as the slaves cannot read! Now, apart from one or two good souls who give us a little help in instructing the sick and infirm in their homes, we have all this to get through alone. Furthermore, we have over a hundred adult pagans coming for instruction every day in preparation for baptism, when they are not prevented by want of time or press of work.

"On Holy Saturday I had the happiness of baptizing solemnly full thirty adults; there were a few more on the Eve of Pentecost, and I hope to baptize a great many on All Saints' Day. We had a great number for First Communion this year, and a great many more are being instructed for it. Moreover, we have had the joy of seeing a large number of heretics coming over to us and entering the bosom of the Church. There is one noteworthy circumstance connected with these: amongst them, eight were admitted to First Communion, six of whom, attacked by leprosy, were amongst the most important people in the town. There are still many of them who have not yet been admitted, but they are preparing carefully. As for the hapless lepers, who see everyone shunning them with horror through fear of contagion —their joy and courage on experiencing the consolation of belonging to the true Faith are indescribable. I am firmly convinced that God in His mercy has sent them this trial only to bring them back to the straight path. How admirable are the works of God! In this land, my dear friend, there is not a Jew, nor a pagan, nor a heretic but must admit that it is only in the Catholic Church these afflicted lepers find strength and consolation. They would look in vain for such priceless benefits elsewhere. Oh, all the proofs I could give you! But I fear making my letter unduly long.

"Fort New Amsterdam, where we go every fortnight, has corresponded with our efforts beyond all our expectations. Without speaking of the slaves from the country districts, several of whom have already been baptized, while many more are preparing for baptism—and their number, we trust, will go on increasing—we have to our account a great many soldiers who have made their Easter duty, and I feel sure that all—about fifty—will make it. To give them every opportunity, we are about to build a church—big or little—in this place. The almighty goodness of God and the generosity of the mother-country will not fail, let us hope, to help us to realize our plan. Mgr. Grooff, our unforgettable father, had already launched the undertaking, for it was his keen desire to have a church here, in order that Mass might be said regularly."

A simple incident shows how completely Father Donders won the sympathies of the people in this spot, even from the outset. As his boat was nearing Fort Amsterdam, the missionary was greeted by a whole swarm of children standing on the bank and shouting delightedly: "Good day, dear Father!"

The affection of which he was the object was equally demonstrative elsewhere, as he himself unwittingly testifies. "The *Johanna Catharina* plantation, on the Saramacca, about twenty-five miles from the town," he writes, "gets a monthly visit from us. Now we have the satisfaction of seeing that there also our trials and sacrifices bear excellent fruit. The slaves show great eagerness for instruction and baptism. Those that have already received baptism are numerous; most of the others are preparing for it, and we entertain the well-founded hope that before long, with God's grace, all will enjoy the same happiness. Here, too, they are imploring us to build a little chapel with a cemetery. The cemetery has already come into being and has been blessed. It will not be long—so we hope at least—before the chapel will appear above ground.

"Your Reverence will gather from all this with what work and worry we are burdened: there is the town, the fort, the plantations, and, to get through it all, there are only our two selves."

The Servant of God has already told us himself that he alone had to shoulder nearly the whole burden; for not only had the health of the Pro-Vicar been shattered by thirteen years of hard work, but he was almost a constant sufferer from his eyes, his legs, and in fact from all the members of his body. Though he had to do everything himself, Father Donders held out till the arrival of a new recruit in the person of Father Gerard Heininck, who landed at Paramaribo on the 13th December of this same year. Though the number of priests in Surinam was thus raised to four—a number still far from adequate—yet, according to the unanimous and oft-repeated testimony of eyewitnesses, it was always Father Donders who took the lion's share of the work, and this he did without encroaching in the least on the time he gave to prayer.

When he came to Paramaribo, the principal church had for sacristan a certain Matthew Bernhard. Now the piety of Father Donders had made such a deep impression on him that, half a century later, when he was in his seventy-ninth year, he made the following deposition at the canonical process:

"At that time, the church had no Stations of the Cross. I noticed, however, that the Servant of God used to go round the church and kneel at certain fixed places, as though the Stations had been really there. I afterwards found out that this was precisely his intention. When I entered the church every morning at six, the holy man was there before me. He was kneeling at the communion rails with a book in his hand—his breviary, I supposed. His devotion to the Most Blessed Sacrament was beyond all conception, and his example contributed not a little to inspiring us with deep reverence for this Mystery. Nearly all his free time was spent before the Blessed Sacrament."

The sacristan spoke also of his love for suffering,

and thought he saw in it the secret of his unalterable patience and complete self-denial.

" Many a time," he said, " I had to remove from the feet of the Servant of God the chigoes that had lodged in them—an operation which, as everyone here knows, is at times extremely painful. But I never heard him utter the slightest complaint, even when I drove the needle or the thorn deep into the flesh. Moreover, he scarcely took any notice either of the stifling heat or of the torrential rains of this country."

And what countless other acts of heroic virtue accompanied and made fruitful the work of this holy man! Sometimes he would give striking proofs of his fearlessness in the fight against idolatry and vice: when, for instance, he would walk straight into Catholic houses and remove and break or tear into pieces the immoral or superstitious objects he had noticed there. Sometimes he showed his invincible patience by meeting low jeers, coarse insult, and black ingratitude with silence and charity. At other times, men witnessed deeds of generosity such as we read of only in the lives of the great Saints.

One day he stripped himself of his garments to give them to the needy or to slaves; on another occasion he handed them the food prepared for his own meal and contented himself with a crust of bread.

As we know, the Servant of God had no private means, and, at this period, the Government paid him no salary. On the other hand, the financial state of the mission was anything but sound, and so the poor Father was often hard put to satisfy his inveterate love of almsgiving. What a joy for him, then, when he could give lavishly to some poor man, and especially when, as often happened, his doing so was the only means he had of preventing sin. When urged by this twofold motive, he left no stone unturned to get money from his Superior. When entreaties failed, he had recourse to artifice. One day he was pleading for a poor woman with Mgr. Grooff, and the Prefect, in straits himself over some money matters, was holding the purse-strings tight. " Well," said Father Donders, " I see no help

for it then; since I must get money, I'll go off and pawn my watch." The ruse succeeded, and the woman received the necessary sum. On another occasion his threat to run into debt moved the heart of his Superior.

However, tricks of this sort were not always successful, and we have it from a missionary who was an eyewitness, that one day the Prefect simply showed the importunate beggar the door. The beggar took it quietly, determined to return to the charge as soon as he got the chance.

These endless appeals for money annoyed Mgr. Schepers and made him grumble. One day the sacristan overheard him say: "Father Donders, you are for ever giving, giving, giving. What will you do when I die?"—"Oh!" came the reply, "God does not die."

A carpenter named Andrew Gerling, who stayed in the house, relates that one day the Father actually carried out his threat concerning the watch. A visit he had paid to a family in distress, which he was unable to relieve, made his heart bleed. He soon made up his mind. Off he went to a certain Jew named De Vries, pawned his watch and hurried away with the money to the unfortunate people. The Jew, who had no intention of keeping the article, brought it to Mgr. Schepers and told him how matters stood. During dinner the Monsignor said: "Gentlemen, somebody has made me a present of a watch; let us draw for it." Father Donders, who guessed what had happened, did not utter a word. Now he drew the watch himself, and, to crown all, the Israelite remitted the entire payment of the loan.

"On two occasions," the same witness declares, "I saw him divest himself of his linen at the presbytery door in order to give it to beggars. His other garments met with a like fate, so much so that by the end of the month we sometimes found his wardrobe absolutely empty. I mentioned the matter to Mgr. Schepers, who in turn spoke of it to Father Donders himself and counselled moderation. The Father promised amendment, but quickly relapsed, so that the housekeeper at last openly complained of the matter: 'I simply can't make out where Father Donders' linen is going to,' she

said; ' 'tis getting so scanty now that I don't know where I stand.' The poor knew all about it. The salary allotted to the man of God by Mgr. Schepers went the same way : after two or three days there was not a penny of it left. It had all gone to the poor."

It need scarcely be added that almsgiving on this scale bore its fruits. A man who knew the Servant of God at the time testifies that, through the tireless zeal with which he sought out sinners without paying any heed to the rebuffs that so often fell to his lot, he wrought numerous conversions. In a suburb called Combe, there lived a woman given up to idolatry. After innumerable appeals, the missionary at last succeeded in converting her. But as it cost her a good deal to part with her idols, the priest removed them from her house himself. Mgr. Schepers declared that he could never have got on in the town without Father Donders, " who managed to worm his way into every nook and corner."

All those who had received a visit from him and had experienced his kindness felt urged to return that visit in his confessional and beneath his pulpit.

" He had more penitents than the other priests," Marius Mehcis tells us; " and although—to be candid—he was by nature rather on the strict side, his words were always taken in good part. I would not like to say that he was exactly a good preacher, but he let his heart go, and that is why, I think, great numbers loved to go to hear him."

Andrew Gerling, the carpenter quoted above, speaks in a like strain. " While the other confessors had already finished, Father Donders had a good many left to hear."—" On the eves of holy days," the sacristan adds, " he remained regularly in the confessional from three or four in the afternoon till ten o'clock at night."

Nearly all the children went to him, as well as the poor, and this is rather surprising when we bear in mind that, though he was kind and gentle, he was always most serious in the sacred tribunal and refused to indulge in any conversation that had no bearing on the sacrament. His exhortations turned for the most part

on the gravity of sin and on its chastisements. In those days he was rather rigid in the matter of giving absolution, and used to impose very grave penances at times. Mehcis, the servant in the presbytery, gives us an instance.

"I had to go to confession," he says, "three times in the week and got absolution only on the Saturday. One day, for a slight act of disobedience in refusing to bring something to a sick person, I got as a penance to make the Way of the Cross three times, for three days, and to recite the Litany of the Blessed Virgin three times." [1]

To judge aright of a manner of acting we now look upon as excessive rigour, we must bear the times in mind. We must remember that there were then many ecclesiastics in Holland who regarded the merciful teaching of St. Alphonsus Liguori, the Most Zealous Doctor—he whom Leo XIII afterwards styled *the most illustrious and the mildest of moralists*—as lax and blameworthy. Even men of note considered it their duty to put confessors on their guard against methods which, as they said, were tainted with laxity and gravely prejudicial to souls. Later on, when Father Donders, following the principles of St. Alphonsus in the guiding of consciences, had acquired the great art of combining

[1] "Mainly through the protection extended to the French Jansenists by the Vicar Apostolic of Neercassel, Jansenism found in Holland a soil favourable to its growth. According to a statement of the Dutch Archpriests in 1791, all the Catechisms were infected with it. It had penetrated even into the Dutch College in Louvain. Under its baneful influence, Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament ceased for many to be the God of love, and Mary to be the Mother of mercy. Only with reluctance did many confessors undertake the work of the confessional. In Holland, as elsewhere, absolution was frequently deferred, even in the case of pious persons, and was given only every six weeks or on the occasion of great feasts. Thus only, it was thought, could the respect due to the sacrament be secured. It is no matter for surprise, then, if in certain ecclesiastical circles the Moral Theology of St. Alphonsus was looked upon, in the beginning, as too mild and put on the list of forbidden books."—J. L. Janssens, C.SS.R., *Leven van den H. Alfonsus-Maria de Liguori.*

a lively horror for sin with unlimited confidence in God, his penitents had nothing but words of praise for his unalterable meekness. "There is no sinner," it was then said, "that Father Donders cannot win round; his earnest and gentle appeals always get the better of the most hardened hearts."

A few details concerning his method of preaching are of interest. "His sermons," we are told, "came straight from the heart and went straight to the heart. He was often moved to tears himself in the pulpit. His voice was shrill. He never failed to say something about the Blessed Virgin."

Certain untoward incidents that sometimes occurred while he was preaching served but to bring his virtue into stronger light. "One day," relates Jane Kustner, who had known him ever since she was a little girl, "one day when I was in the church, a drunken man found his way in and began to interrupt the Father and call out to him to come down and let him up in his stead. As the Father went on quietly with his sermon, and as the troublesome fellow began to shout all the louder, an officer in the congregation took him into custody with the intention of bringing him to the barracks. The preacher, however, who had come down in the meantime, implored the officer to release him. Then, taking his man by the hand himself, he led him to the sacristy, had a chat with him, and wrought such a change in his soul that from that day forward he never tasted strong drink."

In the midst of his great labours, God never failed to come most effectively to his aid. Not only did He fill His servant with a courage that never quailed, but He also bestowed on him a certain fluency of speech. "God," he gratefully acknowledges, "undoubtedly helped me to learn the Nigger English. It gave me no trouble, I may say, and in a short time I was able to converse, first with the children, then with the sick—so that I was able to anoint them, visit or baptize them—and now I find it just as easy to speak and hear confessions in the Negro patois as in Dutch."

At the same time, the fact that God was helping them

did not let the Surinam missionaries lose sight of the need of their own co-operation in the working of that immense field, where immortal souls—pagans, apostates, lukewarm Catholics—were drifting in thousands to their doom. Father Donders certainly did not lose sight of it.

At the thought of the dire need of those sheep without a shepherd, this man of God, once so timid, became fired with a holy daring. He addressed the most stirring appeals to his native land to come to the rescue, calling out, not only for prayers and money, but also and above all for men. On the 5th June, 1843, supporting the Prefect Apostolic in the matter, he wrote to his old class-mates of Haaren and appealed directly to the President to send out two priests as soon as possible. Before a year was out, while Mgr. Schepers was Pro-Vicar, he sounded his appeal in the ears of all Catholic Holland. He sent a detailed statement of the various works of the mission to the Dutch review *De Godsdienstvriend*, which had a wide circulation at the time, and concluded with these spirited words:

"To you, Priests of the Lord, do we appeal. For the love of God and for the love of Jesus Christ, Who once left His Father's throne to save us who were all doomed, come to our assistance, we implore you, and do not let us sink beneath the burden; for indeed we can bear it no longer. Think of and have pity on Most Reverend Mgr. Schepers who, these last fifteen years, has been bearing the burden of the day and the heats. I fear for his life, when I see his difficulties and worries increasing daily. Have pity also, we conjure you, on so many hapless beings who will be lost unless you come to their rescue. Are not they redeemed by the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ as well as we? If, then, there are some to be found amongst you who will hear the voice of God, harden not your hearts, I beg of you. Fear not. There is nothing to be afraid of as long as you have God and the salvation of souls alone in view. We cannot, it is true, promise you earthly goods or earthly joys; but God Himself, I hope, will be our reward as well as yours.

"We beg and beseech of you, then, to come to our assistance at once; send us two priests at least: one for the coastal region, where he could not be more needed than he is, and the second to give us a helping hand in the town. If these indispensable reinforcements be not forthcoming, I fear His Reverence must soon succumb. And you, beloved people, do you assist us also, by your prayers, to begin with, that the Master of the Vineyard may send us labourers and that, meanwhile, He may deign to bless our labours and our sweat and grant us the grace to win those souls that are so dear to Him. There is nothing that the collective and persevering prayer of the just cannot effect. Help us also with your alms. How urgently we need them you can gather from all I have said. Unless they, too, are forthcoming, how are we going to save what is still left? How are we going to bring to a happy issue what is but just begun? Many times we have experienced your generosity, and certainly we are not unmindful of the heavy burdens that lie on the mother-country, especially to-day; all the same, do not forget the Saviour's promise: *Give and it shall be given to you.* God will bless you and reward your generosity, even in this world, as He did in the case of the widow of Sarepta in the days of the Prophet Elias. If a cup of cold water given in His Name will not go without its reward, what will not your reward be in eternity?"

As a result of this appeal, Father Stephen Meurkens, who had been ordained priest at Warmond, joined the missionaries in Surinam on the 28th December, 1844.

The agreeable and sweet-tempered disposition that made Father Donders so popular in the seminary made him still the delight of his fellow-labourers. Father Kempkes, who had lived in his company ever since his arrival, was given charge of the parish of Coronie, in the March of 1843. The reverence and affection he felt for the man of God suffered no diminution from this enforced separation. It was quite the other way, as the following instance shows. On one occasion, Father Kempkes spent three hundred florins to hire a boat to

bring Father Donders from his residence in Batavia to his own house in Coronie, and to bring him home again. He did not consider this too high a price to pay for the good priest's pleasant company, and especially for the advice and encouragement he received from him during the few hours they had together. Mgr. Schepers one day remarked to the sacristan of the cathedral: "If I had two like Father Donders, I could dispense with the rest."

Through the goodwill, courage and charity of all concerned, the success of the mission became daily more pronounced. In September, 1846, Father Donders made the following statement concerning it with evident satisfaction:

"There are many good Catholics amongst the slaves and those who have been recently made free; not a Sunday passes without many amongst them approaching the Holy Table. On the first Sunday of the month and on feast days, the number of communions is really remarkable. I may also add that, since my arrival, many marriages have taken place amongst the slaves and freed men: this year, eleven or twelve couples got married, I think."

The latter half of the year 1847 brought great joy to the heart of the holy priest, to his assistants, and to the entire population of Surinam. After a long absence, Bishop Grooff returned. After having struggled and suffered in the Indies with the constancy of a martyr in the cause of the Church, he was driven by Government orders from Java, on the 3rd February, 1846, and had to take ship for Holland, in company with his assistant priests. He remained in his own country only as long as was necessary for the Holy See and the Dutch Government to settle ecclesiastical matters in the Far East. He then left for Guiana as Vicar Apostolic, after having previously entrusted the administration of the Java Vicariate—of which he was still the titular—to the care of a coadjutor.

After landing in Paramaribo, on the 28th June, 1847, and receiving the warmest of welcomes, he at once resumed work, dividing his time and energies between

the town and Batavia, though with a marked preference for the latter.

One incident relating to this period shows the repute Father Donders enjoyed in the capital of the colony. With his co-operation, the Bishop had erected the Confraternity of the Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary, and took his turn in presiding at the meetings. Now, it happened that a thief, who had intentionally got himself locked into the church, laid hands on the money-box of the sodality as well as on a silver rosary beads. Next morning, when the hour for the instruction came, the Servant of God, informed of the larceny, recommended the matter to the children, asking them to pray that the thief, who was an old offender, might be caught. The ruffian was soon laid by the heels, and he himself attributed his smart arrest to the holy man's prayers—and so did everyone else. True to their spirit of charity, Bishop Grooff and Father Donders pleaded for the delinquent, who got off very lightly.

On the 29th April, 1852, Bishop Grooff died, full of merits, at Paramaribo, from an attack of apoplexy. Before leaving this world, he gave Father Donders a last mark of his confidence by naming him his executor.

The year before his death, the dreadful scourge of yellow fever attacked the town. During this epidemic, which was as virulent as it was contagious, the heroic courage of the man whom many years before the Bishop had extolled as the most generous of missionaries, was once again made manifest to all. Hundreds were laid low. Now, as long as the epidemic lasted, the Servant of God, like an angel of charity, went round the stricken houses; three times a day he went through the hospital, which was soon too small to contain the enormous number of sufferers that were crowding into it, and rendered them every imaginable service. His zeal and disregard of danger carried him so far that at last he was smitten himself and had to take to his bed.

"It was I who nursed him," relates the sacristan, "in turn with a man who has since died. I had to rub him with various liniments. He never murmured and bore all with imperturbable patience."

The Lord, to Whom he had offered up his life that others might be spared, did not think well of taking him at his word. But he had scarcely recovered from his four weeks' illness when, to the great admiration of everybody, he resumed his dangerous visiting. We need not be surprised, then, if after these events people began to look upon him as a saint, and Bishop Schaap was most right in making the followng statement at a later date to the inhabitants of Paramaribo: "The oldest amongst you will remember how, in those days, everybody—Catholics and heretics alike—honoured him as a saint for his utter simplicity and burning zeal."

News of his heroism travelled even to Holland, where it won great praise. The paper *De Tijd*, in particular, stressed and extolled his behaviour during the epidemic in a very eloquent article.

It is fortunate that witnesses were careful to record it for posterity, as all we hear from the humble priest himself is the following: "In 1851 yellow fever broke out in Paramaribo and soon claimed numerous victims, especially amongst foreigners. I visited the military hospital twice a day, and at last contracted the disease myself. I recovered in four weeks and was thus able to resume my numerous occupations."

It was not only his heroism during the epidemic that won him fame in his native land, but also his zeal for souls. In letters from Bishop Van Wijckerslooth to Mgr. Den Dubbelden we meet with these pregnant lines:

"I have heard with great pleasure that there is a missionary in the seminary—another Donders, let us hope."—"Oh, would to God that your seminary, which has produced such fair fruits for Surinam, might do as much for Curazao."—"I should be so pleased were I to find an assistant for Bishop Grooff in the Seminary of Haaren; Fathers Donders and Rutten were such a success."—"The Prefect Apostolic writes to me: 'What an unspeakable joy it would be if, through your agency, I were to experience the pleasant surprise of getting another Donders, or a second Rutten!'"

Shortly after the death of Bishop Grooff, the Surinam

mission was made a vicariate apostolic, with Mgr. Schepers as its first titular. He was nominated titular Bishop of Mellipotamos, and embarked the following year for Holland, where he received episcopal consecration on the 7th September. He appointed Father Donders to administer the mission, as Pro-Vicar, in his absence.

After Bishop Schepers' return to his mission, Paramaribo continued to be the ordinary residence of the Servant of God until the end of 1855 or the beginning of 1856. However, always eager to feed the flame of his all-devouring zeal, he added the arduous visitation of the plantations to the already overwhelming burden that lay upon him.

CHAPTER VI

VISITING THE PLANTATIONS

1843-1856

ALONG the banks of the great rivers and innumerable streams that water Surinam, there were in the days of Father Donders—and there are still in our own—extensive and populous plantations.

"Picture," wrote Bishop Swinkels, some fifty years back, to a confrère in Holland, "picture an immense estate, with the manager's residence usually midway in the foreground; hard by are the store and the hospital, the workshops and sheds for the machines, with a few dwelling-houses for the Negroes; round about is pasture-land, on which may be seen the pen and a row of stakes to which the horned cattle are tethered for the night; on each side of these buildings, as well as at the rear, stretched the land under cultivation."

At the time of our story, thousands of Negro slaves —there were about fifty thousand of them in 1842—were employed in the cultivation of sugar cane, coffee, cotton, and other products and commodities. With few exceptions, they lived in idolatry, and were systematically deprived of all Christian instruction by their masters. Not only was their physical strength exploited in a most revolting fashion and sacrificed to unbridled greed, but, in numerous cases, their souls fell a prey to the passions of unscrupulous masters and overseers. Their material existence was harsh in the extreme: they were overburdened with work, which the lash made still more unbearable, were wretchedly fed and were not allowed sufficient sleep. It is small matter for wonder that a life

such as theirs not only shattered their health but embittered their feelings and brutalized their minds.

One day, during the return journey from his first visit to Batavia, in company with Mgr. Grooff, Father Donders halted at one of these plantations—the *Johanna Catharina*, on the Saramacca—and was enabled to see for himself at close quarters the sad plight of these poor wretches. Distressed at the sight of such misery, he would there and then have made up his mind to devote himself to relieve it. But the activities of the Catholic priest were thwarted by unjust enactments on the part of the Government as well as by the opposition displayed by landowners, managers and overseers, all of whom seemed to take delight in placing every obstacle they could in his path. All this, however, but fanned the flame of Father Donders' zeal.

As early as the year 1832, Catholic missionaries had ventured into these regions, but things had been made so hard for them that practically nothing came of their visit. The *Toledo* plantation had received several visits from Mgr. Groof; in 1842, the *Johanna Catharina* had likewise offered a field for missionary enterprise, and Mgr. Schepers, when Pro-Vicar, had taken up the matter with such warmth and vigour that, in 1852, the number of plantations visited had risen to twelve, while the number of practical Catholics on them was 1,145.

The two chief apostles of these plantations were the Pro-Vicar and Father Donders; but truth bids us say that the bigger share of the burden rested on the shoulders of the latter. He it was, in particular, who undertook the visitation of the plantations on the Lower Surinam and the Lower Commewijne, as it was also he who undertook, for quite a long time, the visiting of the Upper Surinam and the Saramacca.

We will now give the reader some idea of the exhausting nature of the work and of the singular courage and self-denial it called for.

On the morning of the appointed day, as soon as the Masses in the town were over, the missionary went down to the riverside, where a long heavy-looking craft—called the *tentboot*—having a low wooden cabin astern,

A *TENTBOOT*

NEGROES AND CANOES

was moored. The Father lost no time in stowing away provisions and a Mass-kit. This done, he took his place on a narrow seat. Then, at the word of the skipper standing at the stern, the crew of four Negroes fell to their oars, and slowly the vessel glided through the waters of the Surinam, crossed the stream and went up the Saramacca.

Father Donders remained at his prayers. For long hours he conversed alone with God, usually in the open air, except when the blazing sun or a tropical shower drove him into his low and stuffy cabin, where he could sit only by doubling himself in two. Now, to make such a journey in the cool of the evening, or by moonlight, with a pleasant and chatty companion by one's side, is truly delightful, as a witness has declared. But to make it over and over again, under a tropical sun and in torrential rain, is quite another matter. Then the soul becomes utterly oppressed with the weariness and monotony of these journeys. Now for whole years such was the lot of the Servant of God on the occasion of his monthly or fortnightly visits to the plantations.

And yet, to all this, which, one would have thought, was penance enough, this lover of the cross added other penances of his own making. As the humble man had expressly forbade his rowers to say anything about his way of living, most of these penances would have remained hidden from us. Fortunately, the secret leaked out. Some of the boatmen, when summoned as witnesses in the canonical process, made up their minds to speak—though at times a little pressing became necessary—and in reply to the earnest questioning of the judges, they made interesting disclosures.

The cook usually supplied Father Donders with provisions in plenty; but, according to the boatmen and the boy who accompanied them, he gave all these away to the Negroes and the crew, satisfying his personal needs with a crust of bread dipped in the river. During the night, instead of going ashore, he stayed aboard, exposed to the mosquitoes. He gave up his mattress to the boy and slept on a bench himself. One of the

men tells us that he once noticed Father Donders lying with his head on a crown of thorns, and that he discovered several other instruments of penance in the boat.

He was all attention for his travelling-companions. Gisbert Rups, his young help, relates a touching instance of this.

"Sometimes," he says, "in the course of the journey, I would call out in my sleep: 'Mamma, give me a drink of water.' At once the Servant of God would arise, come over and give me a drink."

After a long journey, on which weariness and mortification had been his inseparable companions, the *tentboot* came to land, sometimes at the wharf, sometimes beside the wooded bank, where the missionary, on stepping ashore, had to flounder through swamp and muddy sedge. He began by calling on the proprietor of the plantation, or on the manager, or again on the *Bastiaan*—as the Negro who acted as overseer was called—and humbly asked his leave to hold a religious service for the slaves. A refusal, and a blunt one at that, often followed; and this for the simple reason that many of the slave-owners hated the Catholic religion, in which they saw a menace to their cruelty and greed, and especially to their immorality. But the Father would return to the charge and try to bring home to his friend that he could only be the gainer by the preaching of the Gospel, which inculcates patience and submission. He would persist in his appeals with all reverence and modesty, and would finally succeed in softening the heart of the thick-skinned employer. But he was more than once sent packing, and what then distressed him most was the thought that the privations such a long journey entailed went for nothing, as far as souls were concerned.

If the required permission was granted, he lost no time in availing himself of it. With the help of his men, he got his Mass-kit ashore, tidied up a hut, a shed, a loft—pulled in benches, fixed up an altar, and—the church was ready. Then the *Bastiaan* blew the horn to cease work, and the Negroes could be seen making their

way along numerous paths and slowly massing in front of the improvised chapel. Father Donders awaited them with a smiling countenance and had a kindly word of welcome for them all. Notwithstanding the heat, he set to work at once. He instructed, exhorted, settled disputes, reconciled enemies, heard confessions, blessed marriages, baptized—and all this he did within the narrow compass of the stuffy cabin or loft. Apart from other considerations, it would have been more than enough for any one man, but it was made still more laborious in the case of those poor slow-witted Negroes who, after whole hours of reiterated explanations, understood nothing, or next to nothing, of what had been taught them. The author of this biography was himself a witness, in Paramaribo, of hours of fruitless effort spent in teaching an old Negress how to bless herself, and this after many similar attempts had proved abortive. Now the Servant of God devoted himself to this thankless task throughout entire days, with a charity and patience nothing short of angelic, and he kept at this sort of work for more than forty years.

Gradually his urgent entreaties, his pleasant ways, and, still more, the reputation for virtue—for sanctity even—which henceforth began to cling to him, bore down all opposition; with the result that the owners not only laid their prejudices aside, but even thought themselves honoured by receiving as their guest a man in every way so deserving. One of his confrères in Surinam gives us the following instance of the ascendancy his virtue won for him.

"When Father Donders arrived in Caledonia to convert the slaves to our holy Faith, a rather curious personage, Menalda by name, was discharging the duties of overseer. Born at Groningen, of wealthy parents, he left for the West Indies, after having become bankrupt at home. He did not worry much about religion. When a certain preacher asked him on one occasion to what persuasion he belonged, his reply took the form of a rather questionable pleasantry. In fact, he went his way without caring what people thought of him. The following incident paints him to

the life. One day, when the Governor General of the colony, Van Idsinga, paid a visit to the plantation, the proprietor made it a point to leave his town-house to go and meet His Excellency. The whole personnel was there on the wharf, the manager alone excepted. Now, whilst the Governor was going over the property, Menalda approached, with his hands behind his back. Without changing his attitude, he came forward, and after greeting the high functionary with a nod, put him an insolent question; and then, with another nod, went on his way. The planter, who had witnessed the extraordinarily rude behaviour of his manager, could scarcely contain himself. That night he reproached him bitterly; but Menalda, quite unperturbed, replied: 'Well, and why should I stand on ceremony? I know the Governor well. We are both from Groningen. His people were never much compared to mine, and he knows that as well as I.'—'Granted,' persisted the planter, 'even so, he is just now the chief magistrate of the colony.'—'That means nothing,' came the retort, ''tis blood that counts.' Now this swashbuckler, who did not care a straw for anyone, held Father Donders—who certainly had nothing to boast of on the score of birth—in esteem bordering on veneration."

An old planter, another non-Catholic, who was working a neighbouring plantation, wrote not long ago: "There was one man—and only one—for whom Menalda, and many others besides—including myself—professed great esteem and affection, and that man was Father Donders of Batavia. The moment he appeared, Menalda had a welcome for him. The manager always invited me over on such occasions. Now, though Menalda was not a Catholic, he always listened respectfully to the Father and was invariably courteous and obliging towards him.

"He used to go to expense to entertain him, but it was all useless, as Father Donders never swerved from the laws of the strictest temperance. One day, when Menalda was pressing him to more, the apostle of Jesus Christ pointed in the direction of the poor toiling slaves,

saying: '*They* don't eat meat or drink wine either, and yet they enjoy good health.'—'Do you want to make me out a robber, then?' Menalda asked. 'A robber?' replied the missionary with surprise. 'Yes, a robber,' said the manager. 'Each time you come, I get ten florins for expenses, and you eat barely one quarter of a florin's worth.'—'In that case,' returned the Father, 'don't receive the excess.'"

The following details taken from a colleague's correspondence describe more at length his work amongst the planters. They shed much light on his apostolic virtues, especially on his charity and inexhaustible patience in leading to heaven the poor slaves of those distant regions.

On the 11th November, 1854, Father Donders, accompanied by another priest, embarked for the *Ellen* plantation, on the banks of the Commewijne. They landed that same evening. The manager received them with much courtesy, and very kindly granted them permission to exercise their sacred ministry on the following day. That very evening an instruction was given to the Negroes of both sexes, in a building fitted up for the occasion, and all present were urgently requested to be back next morning. The request was unnecessary, as the sequel showed.

At daybreak, Negroes and Negresses were there in all their finery. On account of the religious services, work was suspended for the day.

"About half-past seven," Father Donders' companion relates, "we began with morning prayers, followed by a short instruction, after which I said Holy Mass, while Father Donders heard confessions in a room close by. I gave Communion to some. Immediately after, Father Donders sang Mass. I took over the choir, and my confrère congratulated me on having kept up the tone so well with those Negroes and Negresses. A second instruction after Mass was listened to with an attention which was most edifying and showed the fervour of those poor people. The afternoon was again spent in instructing, in baptizing infants, and in singing hymns. At last the signal was

given for the missionaries to take leave of their interesting flock."

However, things did not always work out so smoothly. Whenever, for instance, the missionaries had to evangelize a plantation in which the Moravian Brothers had already sown cockle, or which was virgin soil for the priest, they had before all else to clear the ground of the briars of error and superstition. A letter of Father Donders' companion will show them at work.

As long as the *Killenstein* plantation, on the banks of the Commewijne, had remained in the hands of the firm of Hampe & Son, the only visits paid to it were those of the Moravian catechists, and these were few and far between. But from the day, in 1854, when the Bots Brothers of Helmond became the proprietors, they had nothing more at heart than to further the interests of the Catholic missionaries, and they soon proved this by appointing a Catholic manager. Father Donders no sooner heard of it than he decided on going there.

"It was half-past seven in the evening," we read in the letter above alluded to, "when we reached *Killenstein*. The manager received us most kindly and promised to grant all his hands full permission to take part in the religious exercises next day. However, as it was our first appearance in the place, and as the slaves were left perfectly free to come or not as they liked, we were not without misgivings for the morrow. We took care, therefore, to recommend the matter to God and His holy Mother that evening, for to none more than to the missionary is the utter helplessness of man to effect any good without help from on high brought home. God alone knows how truly these slaves are likewise slaves to their own vices, and all it costs to induce them to lift their heads even momentarily from the besotted state in which long habits of sin have buried them. But that was no reason for flinching, far from it; is it not God Who giveth the increase? Encouraged by these thoughts, we went off to bed, and next morning, at daybreak, we got our little altar ready.

"Breakfast was not well over when Negroes and Negresses had already gathered in a large, respectable-looking dining-room. We were overjoyed to see that all, without exception, were present. Father Donders, being older and more accustomed to deal with such audiences than I, gave them an instruction. In a few words he showed them, in the first place, the absolute necessity of asking God's help. He then went on his knees, followed by myself and the whole congregation. Then we both intoned the *Veni Creator*, and all sang it right through. When this was ended, Father Donders preached a very simple but very touching sermon. It was quite clear from the looks of his hearers that his sincere and earnest words went home. Then, before them all, he baptized eleven of their little ones, varying in age from two and three months to six years. I stood for them all. I called one *Amandus*, after the *Gran-Masra* or proprietor, Bots of Helmond; a second I called *Didacus*, after the Saint of the day; and to a third—a beautiful type of black—I gave the name of *Arnold*. The others had Christian names already, and there was no need to give them any more. A special Nigger English hymn called the *Hatti mousu dyompo: Let the Gentiles leap for joy,* was sung. This done, we let them rest a little. I should have told you that when the children had been baptized, I offered my congratulations to the fathers and mothers, calling their attention to the fact that, now that they had a very sympathetic master over them, they should afford him the consolation of leading virtuous Christian lives. They gave me the better hearing as they knew I was on good terms with the planter's worthy family.

"Delighted with such a good beginning, Father Donders and myself congratulated each other and the manager also. In the afternoon, the bell rang, and our friends came together again, and this time I took the children. What a joy it was to teach the Christian religion to these little ones, most of whom were pagans, and amongst whom only those under seven could be baptized! After two hours' hard work, all were able to make the Sign of the Cross and knew

the following truths: that there is but one God, Who created all things and Who created us too; that the three Persons—*Gado Tata, Gado Piquine* and *Gado Santa Jeje*—are one only God; lastly, that we must learn to know God, to love Him and to serve Him. I was delighted with these children, who saw a priest for the first time on that day. Father Donders, too, gave expression to the joy the adults afforded him. The hymn *Granodi, Krine nioumounka: Hail! Virgin pure!* was sung, a brief exhortation followed, then a prayer to that most tender of mothers to recommend those good folk to her, and then we took leave of them with much emotion."

At first, only two plantations—the *Johanna Catharina* and the *Toledo*—had the benefit of a visit from Father Donders; but two more—the *Pieterszorg* and the *Lust tot rust*—were soon added to the list, the former in 1846, and the latter in 1847. In 1849, the turn came for the three plantations on the Surinam, and for a fourth on the Saramacca; and finally, in 1852, divine grace reached further plantations on the Surinam and a third on the Commewijne, so that twelve plantations in all were visited regularly by the Servant of God.

To share occasionally in this exhausting work was as much as Bishop Schepers could do; his precarious health and the fact that his duties kept him usually in Paramaribo account for this. For six months Father Donders had Father Heininck to help him, and Father Meurkens for two years. During the years that ensued, until the Redemptorists came upon the scene, he was quite alone at the work; and even when that work was enough to endanger the health of the strongest, the great-souled apostle did not cease taking on, in addition, the bulk of the work in the town.

Not without reason, then, do we read in the chronicles of the mission: "Father Donders was the first priest who, on taking up his residence in Paramaribo, undertook the systematic visitation of the plantations on the Lower Surinam and on the

Commewijne, and often also of those on the Upper Surinam and the Saramacca. Other priests, indeed, visited individual plantations, but the fact remains that Father Donders was the first to take an energetic initiative in this important work and to ensure its stability."

In his humility, the man of God took good care not to allude to the results of his labours. Fortunately, from a general report of the mission drawn up on the 1st January, 1851, we learn that at that time there were 1,145 Catholic Negroes on the plantations. In 1861, the number of plantations visited rose to twenty-one; and finally, in 1866, when the Redemptorists came to Surinam, it had reached the total of forty, while the Catholic population numbered about 3,000.

Small wonder that when the hour for leave-taking came, the slaves watched through their tears the boat that bore away the only father and friend they had in this world. How they loved him! And how ready they were to do anything for him! How generously, for instance, his converts would comply with his request to surrender those objects of idolatrous worship which they once held so dear and were so sacred in their pagan eyes!

"I saw him myself," says Pauline White, who had known him since she was seven, "I saw him myself destroy the last vestiges of paganism on the *Pieterszorg* plantation; I saw him make his way into a little hut containing idols and bring out two statuettes; I saw him carry off a large jar with a live snake in it to which superstitious honours were paid."

In February, 1871, Father Donders, then a Redemptorist, in a letter to his Provincial, revealed what his many years' experience led him to expect from the visitation of the plantations, together with his views and ideals concerning their organization.

"To comply with Your Reverence's wishes, I am going to open my mind to you to the best of my power and with the help of God.

"Though the spiritual results of the visitation of

the plantations are not as a rule very visible, still I believe that those places in which the missionary labours with fruit are not at all rare. For this reason, such places, it seems to me, should be visited every month, if it could be managed, or every six weeks at least. If the instructions to the Negroes are to bear fruit, they should be characterized by *the greatest simplicity and by much patience*. Whenever old men are to be baptized, we should, I think, first have a talk with them individually, in order to help them to examine their conscience and go through a sort of confession; and this in order to find out, first of all, possible impediments, and then in order to excite those good old fellows, by means of fervent prayer, to true sorrow for their sins, so that they may receive the sacrament of regeneration with the requisite dispositions. After baptism, their confessions should be heard each time they are visited, as far as this is feasible. I make this reservation, as in the case of many plantations this is very difficult for want of a suitable place. Above all, a fervent preparation for as early a First Communion as possible should be insisted upon. They should be urged as strongly as possible to marry, though with caution at the same time, for if bad-living families are numerous, it is the result of their having prepared badly for marriage, and of having started family life under the auspices of the devil instead of with the blessing of God. Instruction, I repeat, is necessary; so is prayer. Parents must be frequently reminded of their duties towards their children. It is much to be desired —and this is of capital importance—that we have catechists who are at one and the same time school-teachers; if they are good-living and pious, they will be a great help. The Government is of the same mind with us on this subject, and would like to see schools opened in every plantation, if possible. It would, moreover, secure their maintenance by a grant."

CHAPTER VII

BATAVIA: THE APOSTLE OF THE LEPERS

1856-1866

FATHER DONDERS' work amongst the Negro slaves was certainly hard on human nature; but it was easy indeed when compared to his work amongst the lepers. The reader will not have forgotten how, at the very outset of his apostolic career, he had accompanied Mgr. Grooff on a visit to Batavia and had there got a glimpse of the appalling misery of its inhabitants. The sight had made such an impression on him that, from that day forward, his one desire was to spend himself without stint in the service of those hapless ones. Thirteen years, however, had yet to pass before he could realize his dream.

Now, in Batavia, in 1849, Father Heininck had already fallen victim to the vengeance of a Negro, who poisoned him for having constantly reproached him with his scandalous ways. Then Bishop Grooff had been obliged through illness to leave the place he had charitably styled his *pleasure-garden*. Then a certain Father Magnee had to give way before a storm of discontent on the part of the lepers, and withdraw from the scene. Christian meekness—so necessary everywhere, but here indispensable—had not been sufficiently blended with his zeal, to say nothing of the fact that his efforts against the propaganda of the Moravian Brothers had been partially neutralized by his harsh ways. In these circumstances, Bishop Schepers had been anxiously wondering whom he could send there

to blot out painful memories and safeguard Catholic interests. One day, when dining with his missionaries, his thoughts were much taken up with this difficult matter, and he suddenly put the question: "Which of you gentlemen will volunteer for Batavia?"—"I, my Lord," Father Donders replied at once as he rose from the table. His words came with such startling earnestness, and he stood so high with everybody for virtue and prudence, that there and then the Vicar Apostolic appointed him to Batavia.

It was towards the close of 1855, or early in 1856, that Father Donders went to his new post. He took up his abode in the presbytery over the little wooden church dedicated to St. Roch. There he resided with a servant named Andrew Gerling, and an old Negress called Cornelia, who did the cooking. Cornelia had been formerly in the service of Bishop Grooff; Andrew was a mere child, as he tells us himself, when he made the acquaintance of the Servant of God in the presbytery of Paramaribo, where he stayed for some time. He followed Father Donders to Batavia, in 1856, and remained ten years in his service. That service was neither onerous nor complicated; the humble and mortified priest dispensed with his attendance as far as possible, and divided his time almost entirely between his prayers and the care of the lepers.

The description of Batavia given above by Father Donders himself has already introduced us to that country and its unfortunate inhabitants. We saw something of the frightful havoc wrought by leprosy in that corner of the colony. However, it will not be amiss to fill in the sombre picture with a few details given by an eyewitness.

"Batavia," writes Father Van Coll, "where from twenty-five to thirty years Father Donders usually resided, has no charms to boast of beyond its situation, which is very fine. The visitor enters a very atmosphere of suffering. The majority of those who have been transported there belong to the lower classes; amongst them are to be found Catholics and non-Catholics,

Negroes, Chinese and Hindoos. All, without exception, are stricken with the same dread disease. The very sight of it makes one shudder; its repulsive odour sickens, and its contagiousness, while not so great as it used to be, is still a source of downright terror. One's ears are filled with the groanings of those poor wretches who see their members being eaten successively away by the pitiless scourge, as well as with the complaints of others who, though not so grievously afflicted, aggravate their sufferings by their lamentations."

From the very first day, Father Donders undertook to visit all these poor creatures in their wretched hovels and make their acquaintance; and there was not one of the hundreds of victims who lived with him in Batavia whom this worthy man did not seek out without delay and try to win to God. The moment a ship with lepers on board was spoken, he hurried down to the shore. It was heart-rending to witness the distress of those stricken people when they set foot on that land of misery for the first time, where the poet's words would be realized in all their horror: *All hope abandon ye who enter here.*[1]

Father Donders was all eagerness to meet them; he greeted them with the tenderest charity, and warmly embracing them, would say: "You'll be all right here, my child." He would then show them to their huts, rush off to the presbytery and emerge laden with good things, which he would then distribute amongst them.

It did not take him long to gain admission into their hearts—into hearts which, in many cases, long years of suffering had sealed against affection. His kind and gentle words prepared the way; and then his acts of charity—nor did he shrink from the most repulsive—soon won him an easy entry. And thus, they who remained obstinately deaf to the voice of God and withheld their trust and affection to the bitter end, were extremely rare.

[1] *Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate* . . . Dante, Div. Comm., *Inferno.*

Let us now see in detail his manner of life amongst these unhappy sufferers.

At six o'clock, Father Donders was at his prayers; on week-days he said Mass at half-past six; on Sundays, if all were not in, he either waited patiently, or went himself to look after the stragglers and spur them on. "The moment the bell rings," he would say, "go to the church at once, and remember it is God Who is calling you. If you loiter on the way to the church, you will loiter going into the Kingdom of God too."

Those whom disease had deprived of the use of their feet, or who had to cross water to reach the church, he carried in his arms to the beaten path, with a mother's tenderness. He would sometimes hire able-bodied fellows to carry them over on their shoulders. He made an urgent appeal to the Governor of Batavia to put a hand-cart at his disposal in which the stronger could carry their weaker brethren.

As soon as Mass was over, he remained at his thanksgiving until eight o'clock, kneeling before a statue of Our Lady. To judge from the two prayer-books he generally used for this exercise, he found this neither easy nor consoling. Sometimes, when asked whether the horrible atmosphere of the chapel troubled him, he would merely say: "Oh, I'm used to it." [1] At eight, he went up to his room, swallowed a little coffee, and then went down again to the church, where he resumed his prayers until nine.

Thus strengthened by prayer and Holy Communion, he began the visitation of his beloved lepers. Without showing the slightest fear, he would enter their

[1] Father Damien, the great Apostle of the lepers of Molokai, said that, on one occasion, so dreadful was the stench that he could not possibly have proceeded with the Holy Sacrifice had not God strengthened him in a most special way. It is interesting to note that a Redemptorist mission, given in 1858, turned him from a commercial to a religious career. His fifteen years of heroic service amongst the lepers were practically concurrent with the last fifteen years of Father Donders' life, the Apostle of Molokai outliving the Apostle of Batavia by fourteen months and two weeks.—Tr.

filthy wooden huts and do for their wretched inmates what a father would be slow to do for his own children. He returned to the church about eleven or half-past, and then only did he take something to eat.

The afternoon found him again in the church, if he were not walking and praying up and down outside in the shade. Except to visit some special case, he did not now go out of doors. This was his time for working at his garden, for weeding it, for looking after his coffee shrubs, and for cleaning up and embellishing the cemetery. And whenever men offered to do these things in his stead, on the plea that such work did not become him, he declined with a pleasant smile.

It was in the discharge of these deeds of charity, broken only by the recitation of his Breviary and a little necessary repose, that the afternoon went by. In the evening, at seven, again he gathered his flock about him in the church, gave them an instruction, and said the Rosary with them; later on, came a visit to the Blessed Sacrament and Our Lady and St. Joseph; and then the day ended with night prayers and a few hymns.

Three times a week, accompanied by all those who could walk, he proceeded by night to the little chapel of Our Lady built on the water's edge. After a hymn in her honour, five *Paters* and *Aves* were recited in common to obtain, through her powerful intercession, the extirpation of the three great disorders that disgraced the land: idolatry, intemperance, and immorality.

After this well-filled day, night did not always mean repose. The Servant of God often prolonged his vigils for hours, either in the church or in his house. More than once he was surprised praying far into the night before the large cross in the cemetery.

His visits to the sick were nearly always accompanied by alms, at least whenever his means allowed of this. And not only did he give away superfluities, but he made inroads on his own bare necessaries: money, clothes, food—everything went

the same way, so that, to succour the indigent, he actually reduced himself to indigence.

"I heard from the old Negress Cornelia," Brother Nicasius relates, "that while still a secular priest, Father Donders had usually not a penny in his pocket, as he had given all away to the poor." His trusty servant, Andrew Gerling, bears similar testimony. "Sometimes," he says, "on his return from a visit to a poor leper, he would send what was already cooked for his own dinner to that person's address, and just take a cut of bread himself. Whenever there was a serious case, he kept running to and fro between the church and the patient's bedside, and never failed to bring something with him in the shape of bread, wine, or the like. About noon, he would tell me or my mother to bring the poor creatures soup."

One day when Bishop Schepers, accompanied by Father Swinkels, paid a visit to Batavia, Father Donders told Cornelia to serve something better than usual. Now it so happened that His Lordship, through unforeseen circumstances, had to accept an invitation to dinner from the doctor. Father Donders looked on this as a grand chance of giving his poor friends a treat; and so, without even tasting the good things himself, he gave them all away to the lepers.

If in many ways the Government consented to alleviate the lot of these poor sufferers, it was undoubtedly due to the persistent appeals of the man of God. Thus the huts were floored, more comfortable beds provided, and orders given that the laundry of the disabled victims should be looked after by able-bodied men. So far did his kindness and condescension go that his personal belongings practically became common property; so that the lepers were often overheard remarking: "Really, 'tis impossible to find a single fault in Father Donders—except perhaps his excessive generosity."

On this head, the evidence given by the lepers during the canonical process was most touching. With great warmth and effusiveness, they detailed the articles of food and clothing he deprived himself of and brought

personally to their houses. "I saw him with my own eyes," said one, "put food and drink to the lips of the crippled." He did more: he fetched them water, chopped wood for them and carried it to their homes; and as long as there were no nurses in Batavia, he used to sweep out and clean up their miserable hovels, make their equally miserable beds, dress their wounds—no matter how hideous and disgusting these might be—and wash their linen and bandages. Kneeling on the floor, he would remove the chigoes from their feet and thus prevent swelling and intolerable itch. And while spending himself in doing them the most loathsome services, so little heed did he pay to his own safety, that many a time the doctors and officials thought it their duty to warn him. "Father," they would say, "take care, you are in danger of contracting the disease."—"Not at all," he would reply with a pleasant smile, "there is nothing to fear, nothing really." And so saying, he went boldly ahead. And yet this same man, who used to dress these horrible wounds every day without ever a thought for himself, felt such sympathy for the suffering that he could not summon up courage enough to be present at an amputation. "One day," one of the lepers relates, "I had to have a finger removed. The Father, unable to stand it, left the room; but the operation was scarcely over when he was back again to console me."

His own pity for these poor beings urged him to intercede with the authorities in their behalf. One of these, Van der Hoop by name, was very severe towards them and very slow to let offenders off. Many a time Father Donders succeeded in softening him, and in having punishment remitted. Another official thus addressed the refractory people: "You deserve to be punished, but for the Father's sake I will let you off this time. Go home now." Whenever he failed and justice had to take its course, he was quite distressed about it, and when the time came for the offender to pay the penalty, he would pat him gently on the shoulder, saying: "Bear it now for the love of God."

He was often called upon to settle disputes himself.

The Negroes especially frequently became involved in heated altercations and fierce street brawls. The moment he caught the sound of one, off he rushed and strove to calm the combatants with kind words. On one such occasion, a Negro inadvertently struck him full in the face. As soon as the fellow saw what he had done, he asked pardon. "'Tis all right," the Father replied, "but this row must stop." Another day, a party of lepers from the *Kent* plantation had got drunk on some rum they had smuggled. They became quite unmanageable, and when Father Donders tried to calm them, he was jeered at and struck.

He was in very deed a mother, and he spoke the truth one day when, conversing with an overseer in Batavia, he referred to the lepers as *his children*.

But it was the cure of their souls and their eternal welfare he had at heart beyond all else. His reply to the parish priest, Van de Ven, who had invited him to return to his native land for a while, clearly shows his mind. "Most gladly would I avail myself of your invitation," he wrote, "were it only out of gratitude; but there is one thing that keeps me here—the fear that, during my absence, the soul of one of my lepers might go to ruin."

The danger he feared was by no means imaginary. Experience was there to show that while leprosy ate away the body of its victim, the soul very often underwent attacks of the most violent passions. This was due, it appears, to three main causes: to the disease itself, as well as to the idleness it begot; to the monotony of the victim's life, brought about by the almost total absence of distractions in Batavia, especially at the period with which we are concerned; and, finally, to the wretched years of slavery that had gone before. And indeed it is small matter for surprise if, under the threefold influence of vice, intemperance and anger, most of these unfortunate creatures were prone to the worst excesses.

In the long run, Father Donders won his way to the hearts of such as these by the kindness he lavished on them. They were the object of his sermons and

instructions; he settled their disputes, he visited their homes; he counselled and, on occasion, chid them. One day he threatened a man who persisted in his obstinacy. Teresa Butheim tells the story:

"The Father had repeatedly urged my husband to live with me, as he had left me for another woman, but James would not hear of it. Then the Father used threats, and, as a matter of fact, as James was landing one day from the doctor's boat, he was drowned, and his body was never recovered."

A Negro, who had been rebuked by Father Donders time and again, gave no sign of amendment. One day the Servant of God said to him: "Man, think well on this: one day you shall die." The Negro laughed him to scorn. "Philip, Philip," resumed the priest solemnly, "I have no hope for you. The hour of grace has passed." A few years later, the man died impenitent.

Still more terrible was the fate of a leper woman called Victoria. She had left her husband for a paramour, and in spite of all that was said to her refused to change her life. She fell ill. Father Donders went to see her; but she turned her back on him without a word. "Victoria," he then said, "I, God's priest, have come to see you and to exhort you to change your life, and you won't answer me?" All to no purpose: Victoria persisted in her guilty silence. Even charitable appeals on the part of kindly neighbours failed to move her. All the while, her illness made rapid progress and death was at hand. Now one day, as he was passing her house, where friends were busy imploring Victoria to enter into herself, the voice of the hardened sinner reached his ears. Things had now gone too far, and it was time to hit hard. Approaching the hut, he said: "Victoria, the devil has succeeded in persuading you not to answer me. But you have a voice, for I have just heard it. Well, listen to me: before you die, you will bark like a dog." So saying, the man of God withdrew and went to the church to get the Viaticum for a sick person. Next day, Victoria, now in a dying state, got out of bed, began to bark like a dog, and

collapsed on the doorstep. She was dead. The priest was summoned in haste. It was too late. "The Father was right," was heard on all sides. Wilhelmina Rijger, who tells the story, spent her whole life in Batavia; she concludes with these words: "I saw and heard all this myself."

Fortunately, obstinacy such as this was rare. With few exceptions, all the Catholics—who numbered from three to four hundred every year at this period—and most of the non-Catholics and pagans, in the long run gave ear to his counsels. But how persistently these counsels were given! Hearts might shut their doors against him for whole months; nothing daunted, day after day he would return to the charge and keep on exhorting until he had won the rebellious soul to God.

A boy had become a Catholic on his mother's death. The bigoted father, infuriated on hearing of it, demanded his return home, and, hurling many an insult against Father Donders, threatened to send back his son to the Moravian Brothers. When the boy refused to eat meat on Friday, the father beat him; but the son held fast. Meantime, the father fell ill. Long lonely hours on a bed of pain brought him to his senses. He sent for the missionary. It meant a journey of about fifteen miles. It mattered not; Father Donders rushed off and spoke kindly to the sick man. Soon after, this same man had himself brought to Batavia. Father Donders spent whole days with him, not leaving his bedside until he had baptized him, given him the last sacraments, and seen him die a beautiful death.

Well merited, then, are these words of praise penned by one of the superintendents of the leper settlement: "From the day when, through the zeal of the missionaries, Christian instruction was put on a solid footing in Batavia, I have not met with one fourth of the difficulties I experienced before in dealing with the population. There is such a marked improvement in morality, as well as in submission and resignation, that we seem to be doing with a totally different class of people."

LEPER CHILDREN

No less remarkable are the words of one of Father Donders' first biographers:

"Since the lepers had lost all hope of being cured, and since their bodies were doomed, Father Donders reminded them of this truth of Faith, that the patient bearing of their pains would cure their souls and save them from eternal death. It was not long before discontent gave way to submission to the divine Will; murmuring ceased, and their poor disfigured faces reflected the joy and serenity of their souls.

"When their sufferings seemed almost beyond endurance at times, the Servant of God would cheer their drooping spirits by pointing heavenwards to the eternal reward promised by Our Saviour to all who suffer patiently for His love. Now, so plentiful were the fruits of his labours, that Batavia—where, for all that, physical suffering could be seen at its worst—was soon rightly called *the garden of the mission*. There can be no doubt about it: most of the flowers of grace that bloomed on that unlovely soil must have been transplanted to the unfading Garden of Paradise, for rare indeed were the sick who died without embracing the Catholic Faith, and rarer still were those who left this world without receiving the sacraments."

To this testimony Father Van Coll adds: "Great numbers learned from Father Donders how to lead a holy life and die a holy death."

After having sweetened and sanctified the days of their sorrowful pilgrimage, and especially its close, his charity would not suffer him to forget the dead. In former times, the poor in the colony were laid to rest with little feeling and scant reverence, though an honourable burial was held in great account and much desired by all. Father Donders, then, was wont strongly to urge his people to attend obsequies in the church and to follow the remains to the cemetery, even those of a poor Chinaman.

Such was the life and such the labours of Father Donders amongst the lepers for more than twenty-six years—ten of which were lived as a secular priest, and

sixteen as a Redemptorist. Twenty-six years! The words are quickly read and quickly uttered. But to live these twenty-six years, and to live them as he did, and to live them day by day and month by month and year by year, ah! how endlessly they stretch out before us! What an unbroken chain of acts of heroic patience they stand for! What countless triumphs over nature, which revolted so instinctively against that prolonged restraint upon the senses, the mind and the heart! Let us add that ten of those long years he spent quite alone, with no companion by him into whose brotherly heart he could unburden his own, from whose lips he could gather the word that strengthens and consoles. Later on, on his becoming a son of St. Alphonsus, his condition was bettered indeed and his isolation relieved, when Superiors usually gave him someone who would be a confrère and a help. And yet, even he who was the companion of his closing years fell a prey himself to the hideous disease.

And now, there is none, we venture to think, of all who read these pages but will naturally ask the question: whence did this priest derive the strength, the heroic strength without which he could never have achieved all this? It came from the same source from which he drew it first as a child, then as a young man, next as a student, lastly as a priest; only now it flowed in upon him in an ever fuller stream. One who was with him in the Preparatory Seminary writes thus: "When I afterwards learned certain details of his apostolic life, I recalled the virtues of his youth, and I saw clearly that the rich efflorescence men so admired had been already in his heart in germ."

This apostolic man, who was in quest of God alone, and of souls in God and for Him, was profoundly convinced that prayer and forgetfulness of self are the essential conditions for the discovery and acquisition of this twofold treasure.

Of his spirit of prayer we know something. With regard to his self-denial, by this time the mortifications inherent in his work and in the climate were no longer enough for him; in Batavia, and even on his journeys

through the colony, he generously added austerities of his own choosing.

Eyewitnesses have many things to say on this point. Amarantha Tijdig, who arrived in Batavia a month after him and survived him there, speaks as follows: "Father Donders could not possibly have given much time to sleep. Many a night I had to look for him for a sick-call, and then I either found him in the church or, if I had to knock at his door, he was ready in a moment. One day, when he had gone out, I went into his room. I noticed a plank lying on the floor. The old servant, Cornelia, said to me: 'That's his pillow when he sleeps on the ground; but he told me to say nothing about it.'" Andrew Gerling speaks thus: "I used to sleep on the same floor as the Father. He used to leave his room during the night to pray. He slept on a bed, it is true, but he removed the pillow and mattress." This witness has more to tell us: "I often heard Father Donders taking the discipline while he was still a secular priest. I noticed little iron chains in his room, and several times I found blood-stains on his garments. He never complained either of the heat or of the bad weather. He used to drive off the mosquitoes by blowing on them, but he never killed them; nor would I have killed them either when he was there, for when they got away, he would say: 'Let the little creatures live.' He used to wait a long time before having the chigoes removed from his feet, and when he let me take them out at last, he forbade me to kill them, saying: 'They'll die all right themselves.'"

Thus was the soul of this priest made daily more conformable, feature by feature, to the image of Jesus Christ praying and suffering.

Let us now hear what the same Andrew Gerling has to say concerning his temperance at table: "His usual dinner consisted of native fruit or something of that kind; the meat sent into him from the town he distributed among the servants or the sick. I never saw him take wine or beer, except when he had a visitor, and then he just put the glass to his lips. The same frugality marked his evening meal. As soon as it was

over, he went off to the church, where he remained praying until half-past nine, and then he went upstairs to bed. As I slept on the same floor, I could hear him go downstairs to the church from time to time. It would be midnight and even one o'clock before he came in. Others besides myself often noticed light in the church during the night, or heard him walking up and down inside."

Equally edifying are the details of humility and mortification related by the old Negress Cornelia to the people in Batavia.

"She was supreme in the presbytery," says Father Kuyper, "and unless I am mistaken, she must have afforded the Servant of God many a chance of practising virtue. She told me herself that he was most abstemious in the matter of food and drink, and never showed any preferences." Amarantha Tijdig says: "Cornelia told me herself that some days she had no cooking to do, as these were the days on which he went fasting. In any case, he ate little. When taking his soup, he would say, by way of pretext, 'Tis too salty,' and would then tell me to bring it to the sick: he would remark—though he was wrong in this—that the meat was too tough, and then the meat went the same way."

This love for his brethren, which urged him to give away and sacrifice everything, even his own self, was indeed great. But how much greater does it appear when we consider the lofty motive behind it! What inspired this utter abnegation of self was not, needless to say, a vague philanthropy, but the love of God and divine charity at its best. What he beheld and looked for and found in those poor outcasts was God, and God was the fundamental motive underlying his deep respect for them. "It was quite evident," declares a witness, "that it was Christ or their holy angel that he honoured in all those poor creatures." He once unwittingly revealed the liveliness of his faith in this matter. He was asked one day if it would not be better to assert his authority a little more, by not being the first, for instance, to take off his hat and bow—as was his wont—on entering a leper's room. He replied:

"And suppose I do it on account of the man's Angel Guardian, what harm can there be in that?"

If Father Donders won the affection of men to such an extent, God was pleased to show men how dear His Servant was to Him also at this period of his life in Batavia.

Lawrence Doel, who knew Father Donders all the time the latter lived in Batavia, relates how one day, during the hot season, the water failed. The people went and laid their trouble before their Father. "This evening," he replied, "go to Benediction and pray fervently. Who knows? perhaps God will send you rain to-night." And in point of fact, at eight o'clock that same night, the rain came down in torrents and never ceased until about seven the following morning.

The only recreation he allowed himself while leading this life so dreadful for flesh and blood was the visitation of the plantations; and even this was a recreation well befitting an apostle, as its object was the salvation of neglected souls. Scarcely had he arrived in Batavia when he set about this work in the plantations that had been previously visited; but, since July, 1864, he had added the *Pieterszorg* and *Resolutie* plantations to the list.

The end Bishop Schepers had in view when appointing Father Donders to Batavia was fully attained. His affability and charity, which went the length of heroic self-denial, at last bore down all opposition and wiped out the bitter memories of his predecessor's imprudences. The lepers resumed their religious practices; the stray sheep returned to the right path, and—what was most remarkable—the Moravian preachers, finding no further outlet for their activity, gave up visiting Batavia altogether. What is equally remarkable is that Father Donders wrought this revolution with such tact that his very adversaries entertained no personal animus against him.

"When I was manager on the *Catharina Sophia* plantation," declares Mr. Gefken, a man universally esteemed, "I knew a Moravian Brother who never

spoke of Father Donders except in terms of the highest praise. He used to visit Batavia at that time, and, as he told me himself, he never failed to call on the Father whenever he knew him to be at home. And when telling me about him on his return, he invariably concluded by saying: 'He's surely a holy man.'"

The following detail, belonging to this period, brings out his delicate charity. "On several occasions," Father Van Coll relates, "I requested Father Donders to let me have details concerning his predecessor's manner of acting, as I was working at a history of Surinam at the time. I could never get a word from him on the subject; he used to change the conversation."

Thus did he live and labour uninterruptedly for ten long years, amongst the poorest of the poor, when God was pleased to grant him—in his fifty-seventh year—a grace he had vainly prayed for years before. But before entering upon this subject and leaving Batavia for a time in his company, let us gather from the lips of witnesses, especially from the lepers, one further testimony, which sets his fatherly goodness of heart in striking relief.

An old soldier who had been garrisoned in Surinam in 1870 often spoke to his wife about our hero. "So good was this priest towards the lepers," he often declared, "that his like could not be found in the world."—"One day," his wife relates, "my husband said to Father Donders: 'Could not my wife and I get a peep into these huts?'—'Oh, no, my dear man,' he replied, 'tis too dreadful inside: you'd never stand it.' On another occasion, I showed my husband a picture of Father Donders, saying: 'How thin he is!'—'You'd soon be thin yourself,' he answered, 'if you had to go through all he went through and to live amongst such people.'"

Amarantha Tijdig made the following deposition: "The people in Batavia loved him on account of the services of every possible description which he did them." Then, after detailing some of the services we mentioned above, she thus concluded: "Father Donders worked night and day for our salvation; and when he

did rebuke us, it was never with bitterness, but always with gentleness."

Agatha Prent stated that she knew Father Donders the whole time he lived in Batavia. "God alone knows," she says, "all the Father did for his own salvation by looking after the souls of others; he did good to everybody."

Cornelia Pochum-Walle, who knew him to the day of his death, declared in the outpouring of her gratitude that "the people in Batavia loved him greatly, and that they did so not only because he laboured for the salvation of their souls, but also because he helped them in every possible way." She then recalled, after the manner of one who had seen it all, the motherly care he took of the lepers.

Similar declarations were made by womenfolk in Batavia during the canonical process, and in language all the more impressive for its artlessness and simplicity. The people used to call him *the holy Father Donders* and *my kind Father, mi papa*, especially on account of his gentleness. And this stricken population, taught more by his example than by his preaching, learned to sacrifice themselves in turn for their neighbour, for they all knew how deeply convinced he was that what he did for them he was really doing for God.

CHAPTER VIII

THE REDEMPTORIST NOVICE

1866-1867

THE work wrought by grace in all souls that faithfully correspond with it never slackens. *The path of the just, as a shining light, goeth forward and increaseth even to perfect day.*—Prov. iv. 18. But while God allows some to pursue to the very end the twofold object of their own sanctification and that of their brethren by walking the way of His commandments, He urges others up the steeper and more thorny path of His counsels. In acting thus, His purpose seems to be to provide both one state of life and the other with finished models of holiness.

To the second category belong men such, for instance, as St. Alphonsus, who began by being a secular priest, and then became the founder of a religious congregation; St. Clement Hofbauer, who, after having lived as a hermit, was called to undertake the work of spreading that same Congregation in the Transalpine countries; the Venerable John Neumann, whom God withdrew from a flourishing apostolate near Niagara, to make of him the first in the United States to seek admission into the family of Alphonsus, on which he was to shed such lustre by his virtues.

Now grace was to take the same course with our hero. He was to be a model priest and a model religious, and so he was now called upon to crown the many sacrifices he had already made with the complete immolation of his own will and of that liberty of action he had hitherto retained.

The Servant of God was now about fifty-seven, and in a letter he exclaims: "To become a Redemptorist! And in Surinam! How wonderfully God arranges all things!"

What had happened to bring this about? On the 27th November, 1863, Bishop Schepers, the missionaries' trusty friend and zealous Superior, after having laboured for thirty-three years on the mission, first as a member, then as its head, died. At his death, he had to his account the organization of religious instruction, the founding of a community of the *Penitent Sisters* of Roosendaal, together with a school for boys and an orphanage, and, finally, the erection of a second parish, under the invocation of St. Rose. He died poor, and his dying wish that his coffin and funeral should be poor was carried out.

His successor, the Very Reverend Father Meurkens, soon fully realized what had begun to dawn on those who went before him, viz., that Catholicism would never come to anything permanent in Surinam as long as the system hitherto adopted of working the mission with a handful of individual priests from the mother-country was adhered to, and that nothing short of the united services of a fully-organized missionary body should be enlisted. Such a body, of course, could scarcely be looked for outside the ranks of a religious congregation.

Ever since a royal decree of the 31st July, 1863, had given liberty to fifty-three thousand slaves in the colony, the field of missionary activity had suddenly expanded to enormous proportions.

Now, as Father Donders wrote, "whereas, under the slave system, the Negroes belonged body and soul to the planters, so that they enjoyed no religious liberty and were compelled under threat of terrible chastisements to espouse their masters' cause in every respect, all was, of course, now changed. However, two things would follow: on the one hand, a more plentiful harvest was to be looked for; on the other, the harvesters would have to put forth greater and more persistent efforts."

The situation had given the Pro-Vicar food for much anxious thought before he left for Holland, and

eventually for Rome. A report he presented to Propaganda on the status of his mission resulted in the Vicariate Apostolic of Surinam being handed over to the Provincial of the Dutch Redemptorists, by a decree of the 17th July, 1865. The measure received papal approbation on the 30th of the same month and was ratified by a decree of the 31st of the following August, appointing the Provincial—Father Swinkels—Vicar Apostolic and titular Bishop of Amorium. He was consecrated at Bois le Duc on the 12th September, and on the 15th October of the same year set sail for his distant mission, accompanied by Fathers Van der Aa and Van Rooy and the Laybrother Lambert, a brother of his own. They reached their destination on the 26th March, 1866. They were accorded a most enthusiastic welcome on the part of the clergy and the Catholics; Father Donders was detained at the time in Batavia.[1]

The Servant of God had lately been reading the Life of St. Alphonsus, and the story of that outstanding missioner, as heroic in his daily striving after virtue as in his untiring warfare in the cause of souls, had enkindled within the heart of the holy priest a great yearning to be numbered amongst his sons. After much earnest prayer, his longing became a fixed resolve.

At the same time, he could not forget how, thirty years before, he had been turned away when he applied for admission into the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer in Belgium, and, naturally enough, the memory of this disappointment did not leave him altogether without misgivings concerning the fate his renewed application would now meet with at the hands of the same religious body. The humble man did not,

[1] Bishop Swinkels, born at Woensel in 1810, was ordained priest at Warmond in 1834. Nine years later, he became a Redemptorist and displayed outstanding qualities as a preacher and a confessor. His amiability quickly won all hearts. He became Rector in Amsterdam, in 1851, and, in 1855, first Provincial of the Dutch Province and English Vice-Province. He was succeeded in this office, in 1865, by Father Konings, the well-known theologian.

of course, dream that it might enter into the designs of God to turn his varied missionary experiences to account; still less could he have imagined that the Lord was about to make use of him for a twofold end: that the Redemptorists might have by them in this new field of missionary enterprise one who was thoroughly acquainted with the working of it, and that the whole world might learn from the example of his life that even under tropical skies the flower of religious perfection can thrive and bloom in all its beauty.

Bishop Swinkels was barely a month in Paramaribo when he had a visit from Father Donders. The missionary came to pay his respects and to tender his allegiance to his Bishop; he came also to seek admission into the Congregation of which the Bishop was the Superior. His Lordship, though agreeably surprised, did not think it wise to give a decisive answer just then. He advised the priest to think the matter over yet a while, and, meantime, to try the religious life there and then for a few days. Father Donders eagerly agreed to the proposal. The prelate, on his part, profited by this occasion to study the beautiful soul the Lord had led to him. Everything he saw for himself, as well as everything he heard from others, confirmed him in the opinion he had at first formed, that this priest was a saint, whose one desire on entering religion was to reach still loftier altitudes of sanctity. He admitted him as a postulant.

Soon after, his example won another valuable recruit for the Congregation in the person of Father John Romme. After having filled three curacies successively in Holland, he had felt a strong desire for the apostolic life and had landed in Paramaribo on the 8th February, 1864. The following year, he had witnessed the definite departure of three of the missionary staff: Father Meurkens, who remained in Europe after his last voyage, and Fathers Swinkels and Masker, who returned home on the 2nd July. He, however, could not bring himself to leave the vineyard he was cultivating with some success. He remained on, therefore, though he had no intention of becoming a Redemptorist. Now he

had scarcely heard of his friend's decision than he felt a strong stirring within his own heart. He prayed and pondered much and soon made up his mind to be a Redemptorist likewise. More than a score of years later, when gratefully recalling the instrument Providence made use of to bring him into the Congregation, he wrote as follows to his Superior, on the 18th April, 1887:

"I always recall with thankfulness how it was in great measure to Father Donders' example that, after God, I owe my vocation. It was four or five months after Bishop Swinkels' arrival that I heard Father Donders had been accepted and that I thought seriously of applying myself. Up to that time, as far as I can remember, it had never crossed my mind."

After an examination, which in his case too was quick and decisive, Father Romme was received into the Congregation, in which he lived as a true Redemptorist until his death in Coronie, on the 19th July, 1889. An hour before the end, with a joy that was manifest to all, he renewed the religious vows he had taken with such generosity.

The presbytery in Paramaribo, which had already been transformed into a convent, had thereupon become the novitiate. However, certain urgent matters had first to be settled before the time of probation could begin. Batavia could not get on without Father Donders, nor could the young community, on the other hand, provide a substitute. Accordingly, after a fortnight's trial of the religious life, Father Donders returned to his lepers. This was on the 1st May. On the 28th June he was back again in Paramaribo, where he and his old colleague, Father Kempkes, were anxious to celebrate their silver jubilee of priesthood. On the 1st July, the two jubilarians gave a dinner to the secular and regular clergy. Father Donders, who could never put off the apostle, turned his stay to account to visit the *Vier Kinderen* plantations, on the Upper Para. On the 18th he was down with fever, but was soon himself again. At last, on Wednesday

the 24th July, he was received as a novice into the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. On the 29th of the same month, he visited Batavia for the last time as a secular priest. On the 20th September, Bishop Swinkels wrote as follows to his Provincial, Father Konings:

"Father Van der Aa is improving every day (he had had an attack of yellow fever); as soon as he is himself again, I will send him to join Father Donders in Batavia, where they can work together until such time as Father Van der Aa is able to get on alone. I will then recall Father Donders; Father Romme will be in the novitiate by that time, and thus I shall be able to undertake the training of both."

Father Van der Aa left for Batavia in the afternoon of the 13th October and arrived there on the 15th, the feast of St. Teresa, thus enabling Father Donders to enter the novitiate without further delay. On the 26th of the same month, Bishop Swinkels wrote to the Provincial:

"Reverend Brother Donders is here. Only for the visits Father Romme was obliged to make to the plantations, from the 15th October to about the end of the same month, I could have given them the habit on the feast of St. Teresa, the anniversary of my consecration. The ceremony has now been put off to All Saints' Day. I can assure you unhesitatingly even now that neither of the two is going to disappoint us."

On the 1st November, 1866, Reverend Brothers Donders and Romme received the habit of the Congregation from the hands of Bishop Swinkels, and began their novitiate under his guidance. The circumstances were so abnormal and the dearth of priests so great that, though strictly speaking, the whole year's probation should be spent in recollection and retreat, the novices had to devote a certain amount of their time to external work. But, as Bishop Swinkels points

out to the Provincial, when writing in 1867, the two novices in question were men of tried virtue.

The Bishop begins his report by setting forth the difficulties of the situation. He writes:

"Father Baptist is dead; Father Luyben is lying ill in Batavia; Father Verbeek can no longer be counted on for work in the church. Fortunately, I have the two novices with me and they give the services in Nigger English; I take charge of the Dutch service mostly myself." He then goes on to speak in detail of the great earnestness displayed by the two priests in the work of their perfection, and he proceeds: "Peter Donders was sent to the Batavian mission in 1856 and has never ceased being a source of edification by his utter self-sacrifice in the service of the lepers. Here he is looked upon as a saint. Prayer, mortification and almsgiving are his delight. The poorest, most depraved and most revolting sinners are his favourites. He is as docile as a child and blindly obedient. The only outward evidence of fallen nature I have ever detected in him is a flush that mounts to his cheek whenever I humiliate him in public. He is by nature very vivacious—though virtue has made him imperturbable—and his company is delightful. I only wish he were several years younger. He exercises a marked ascendancy over all classes—Jews and heretics, rich and poor, even over the Governor and the highest functionaries. His health is excellent, and it is not easy to tire him."

Thus did his Novice Master confirm the opinion formed by all who had ever associated with him—by the friends of his young days, by his schoolmates and Professors, by his Superiors and fellow-workers—that no fault had ever been noticed in him and that he was a perfect model in all things. Great as was his perfection as a novice, it stood out in still bolder relief when compared to the perfection of others; and, as Bishop Swinkels points out in his report, he outshone even those who were eminent in virtue. Speaking of Reverend Brother Romme, his Lordship writes: "He is much given to prayer and is no less given to

mortification; and yet Brother Donders excels him in both."

It will come as no surprise, then, to hear that the period of probation, which, according to the Rule, should last a twelvemonth, was shortened in favour of two such exemplary novices. Falling in with the suggestion of Bishop Swinkels, Father General allowed them to be admitted to profession on the 24th June, 1867, that is to say, after eight months' probation; and accordingly, on the feast of St. John the Baptist, in the church of SS. Peter and Paul, Fathers Donders and Romme pronounced their vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, together with the vow and oath of perseverance in the Congregation until death.

"God be praised!" Bishop Schaap afterwards exclaimed, when recalling the event in his funeral oration on the Servant of God, "God be praised! we had received a saint into our ranks."

Two days later, when writing to his friend and benefactor Father Van Someren, Father Donders thus gives vent to his gratitude and joy: "For the love of heaven, will you thank God for me, for I cannot do it as I ought myself. How wonderful are the ways of Providence! At my age, in my fifty-eighth year, actually to become a Redemptorist! and in Surinam! and in Paramaribo! I simply cannot tell you my joy and happiness. Ask God, I beg of you, to give me the grace to persevere until death, as I have solemnly promised and sworn to do."

We note one phrase in this letter which brings out clearly the love this man already bears to his Order, just a few days after entering it: "I hear you are very kindly disposed towards our Congregation, and I am delighted."

What he says a little farther down is especially remarkable, besides bringing out the perfection of his virtue: "I have been changed from a secular priest into a religious priest almost without noticing it, thanks be to God, and everything is getting on splendidly."—"Everything is getting on splendidly": these words will escape his lips more than once.

On the 12th December, 1869, more than two years after his profession, he writes to Father Vogels: "How wonderfully God arranges everything! May God grant, and may His holy Mother grant that I may persevere in my sublime and holy vocation. I surely may count on the help of God and on the intercession of Mary and our Father St. Alphonsus. . . . Let us pray for each other, that we may persevere."

This happiness never left him, and he loves to give vent to it on all occasions. He returns to it in most of his letters to his Provincial. About the year 1874, he writes to his Superior: "From the day on which, by God's grace, I was received into the Congregation, I do not think I ever passed a day, or even an hour, without experiencing great joy in my holy vocation and in common life"—"except for an odd trial or temptation," he adds further on, "which I got over, by God's grace."

In May, 1875, eight years after his profession, he lets his heart speak thus: "I can never thank God enough for having called me to the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. May the God of all bounty grant me the grace to live as a true Redemptorist and to persevere until death. Daily I ask for this from His mercy, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, our beloved Mother."

Four years later, when putting the story of his vocation on paper, he writes: "And now I am happy, thanks be to the special mercy of God; but one thing is wanting to me: to live as a perfect Redemptorist and to persevere to the end. God grant me this grace through the intercession of His holy Mother and our holy Father Alphonsus."

We come across numerous passages in his correspondence written in a similar strain. This true Redemptorist loves to identify himself more and more with his brethren in the Dutch Province. Though personally unacquainted with any of them, he never fails, when writing, to send his "heartfelt greetings to all the Reverend Fathers, and to the Students in Wittem."

Nor is he ever done expressing his love for St. Alphonsus, as is evident from his letters. "I must thank you most heartily, Reverend Father, for the books," he writes, "and especially for the Life of our holy Father Alphonsus, which you sent me." And again: "St. Alphonsus, I trust, will join the holy Mother of God in praying for the conversion of the Indians."

In his notes of the canonical visitation of 1882, Father Oomen, his Provincial, writes:

"Father Donders spoke much with me on spiritual topics, and this without any affectation and with utter artlessness. In particular, he could not say enough of his love for the works of St. Alphonsus, on account of their unction and their great simplicity. He spoke with the same affection of our Institute, of its work and its growth."

This love for the religious family to which he belonged never waned, even in his closing years. It even outlived him. In 1882 Father Donders wrote to his Provincial: "If God shows me mercy and admits me to His vision and His love after death, I will certainly remember Your Reverence and the members of the Congregation, and I will pray for you, above all others."

CHAPTER IX

THE MAN AND THE SAINT

Now that we have reached this important turning-point in the life of our hero, it will not be amiss to portray the man and the saint. Our task is an easy one, as the documents at hand since his entry into the Congregation are numerous and detailed. They are chiefly: reports sent to superiors, as well as manifold declarations on the part of confrères; letters of the Servant of God, great numbers of which have been preserved, as well as personal notes on the work of the mission; and lastly, two brief autobiographical sketches composed at the bidding of Bishop Schaap.

In mature age, Father Donders was rather short in stature and had a slight stoop. Though his features were pale and emaciated, yet they were in no wise harsh, but rather wore an expression of mingled gentleness and good-humour. His hair, originally auburn, and almost fair, had gone prematurely grey through hard work. So frank and cordial were his clear grey eyes that they at once held captive those on whom they were turned. After the customary greeting, he usually kept them cast down. As he had lost his teeth when nearing sixty, his lips had slightly fallen in. His voice was soft and winning, and contemporaries assert that there was an irresistible charm about the man, and that it was delightful to hear him speak. As the reader will remember, his fellow-students used to call him a Saint Aloysius; while those who knew him in his riper years were wont to compare his appearance to that of the Curé of Ars. Father Oomen, who paid him a visit in Batavia in 1882, wrote thus in his account of the journey:

"You may wonder what impression he made on me when I saw him for the first time. Well, I thought I was looking at the Venerable Curé of Ars himself as we know him from the well-known portrait, except for the hair, which the Curé wore long, while Father Donders wore his short. The rest was the same—the same features on which were stamped, not merely piety and mortification, but the most natural simplicity and unvarying affability and kindness."

The frail puny child we have known enjoyed sound health all his life long, in spite of his superhuman labours.

"I never remember him to have been ill," writes Amarantha Tijdig; "whenever he got a slight attack of fever, he would simply say: 'This fever came of its own accord, and it will go away of its own accord,' and he would take no medicine." In 1875, Bishop Swinkels spoke of his health as "indestructible," and of his powers of endurance as "marvellous to the extent of being able to endure holy excesses." Even his unparalleled mortifications could not break it down. "Reflect," said Bishop Schaap afterwards when delivering the funeral oration on the Servant of God, "reflect that so many nights spent before the Blessed Sacrament, that his daily fast and abstinence, his painful macerations, persevered in ruthlessly through long years, did not prevent him from enjoying continual good health and reaching his seventy-seventh year."

He set a great store by this health of his, looking on it as God's own gift and as a means of doing great things for His glory. A few years before his death, he wrote: "I am as well as ever, thank God, and I cannot be grateful enough to His goodness. With His help, I hope to use my health and strength to the very last for His greater glory and for the salvation of my neighbour."

He dressed very simply, but his clothes were always neat and clean, though much the worse for the wear. He would never wear a torn garment, and he often did the patching himself. His cassock was so faded that

one day Bishop Schaap, meeting him in Paramaribo, pointed out to him that it was scarcely good enough for the town. "Alas!" he replied, "everything fades quickly with the sun in these lands."—"And would you not take mine?" said the Bishop. "With great pleasure," was the answer, and back he went to Batavia wearing Bishop Schaap's Redemptorist habit.

Contrary to the general practice, he never made use of a sunshade. Even when still a secular priest, he used to say his Rosary when going through the streets, and wear a crucifix on his breast.

Towards the end of his days, his lifelong mortification and recollection had so etherealized his whole personality—eyewitnesses tell us—that in Batavia there were found people simple enough to believe that he would never die. He was, they said, more a spirit than a man.

As we already know, his mental endowments, though adequate, were far from outstanding; his knowledge was in keeping, and yet, by dint of unremitting industry, as well as by persevering prayer, he made progress even in this. Bishop Swinkels spoke as follows of him at a later date:

"He has a good memory and a clear, sound judgment. His theological lore is indeed mediocre, but his virtue makes up for this. He possesses enough secular knowledge to be useful to the Negroes and Indians; his external gifts are almost nil."

Father Oomen wrote to Father General in 1882: "Considering his years, there is no further question of putting him in office. Besides, I do not think he has the necessary qualifications for any important post."

We have seen how, as a student, his lack of ability was compensated for by his virtue. The knowledge of divine things had cost him far less effort to attain than had profane science, and apart from the help given him by grace, we may surely look on this as a result of his great love for God. Was it not St. Augustine who said that "love is an eye"?—and a keen eye at that. In a very short time after landing in Surinam, Father Donders was able to speak Nigger English fluently.

FATHER DONDERS PREACHING

This was, of course, the fruit of strenuous work on his part, undertaken and maintained by his burning zeal; but there is no reason why we should not recognize in it the hand of the Holy Ghost, Who is lavish of His gifts to those who do what they can and who ask for grace to do what they cannot. Now, amongst the virtues which, by means of unceasing prayer, brought down upon Father Donders the gifts of wisdom and counsel, his prudence and simplicity must take the first place. It was from God and His Blessed Mother that he sought light in all his difficulties, without at the same time disregarding the advice of wise and competent men.

"One day," relates Father Van Coll, "a quarrel arose among certain families, and Father Donders had exerted every effort to restore peace, but without success. He then wrote to me: 'What better could I do than have recourse to God and to Mary, in order to find out how I was to act. So I went to the church and said a Rosary, beseeching Mary—that good Mother of Perpetual Succour—to advise me, when suddenly I saw my way and understood what there remained for me to do. Shortly after, the whole affair was settled.'" And Father Van Coll, after bestowing the highest praise on his confrère's supernatural prudence, adds: "Father Donders used to behave towards me with the simplicity and openness of a child; many a time he came to me for advice in his difficulties."

Bishop Schaap is equally loud in praise of his simplicity, which he speaks of as "charming," and which, he tells us, "was always accompanied with heavenly prudence"; for these two virtues went ever hand in hand in the Servant of God. Indeed, simplicity was his leading spiritual characteristic. We have already observed how careful he was to avoid even the shadow of singularity and affectation. "You would have to look very closely to discover anything extraordinary about him," says Father Oomen.

There was the same simplicity about his apostolic work. The young man who cut such a sorry figure at the declamation class in the Preparatory Seminary, but who, even in the Theological Seminary, compelled

admiration and even reverence by his sheer earnestness, now never opened his lips without making a deep impression on all who heard him. And yet there was nothing studied about his language.

"In Batavia," Father Van Coll observes, "when he spoke from the predella, he had a way of stepping backwards and forwards, and his gestures used to follow these movements."—"On becoming a missionary," the same witness says, "he undertook to learn the piano. He certainly found it useful, as he always carried a little harmonium around with him on his journeys amongst the Indians. But we can guess all it must have cost one of his years to learn it. The fingering was the big difficulty. More often than not he would miss the note, and when the music-master would say, 'Wrong note, Mr. Donders,' he would rub the keys with his fingers, as though to rub out the mistake."

With regard to his qualities of heart, he was keenly sensitive to whatever gave pain, and this not only when others were concerned, but also in his own case. However, owing to his habitual self-control, this never interfered with his prevailing good spirits. His gratitude also for favours was always sincere and abiding.

Only that he held his naturally impulsive disposition in check, it would have quickly broken out in anger and impatience; but he kept a close and constant watch upon it, and at the slightest sign of revolt, he would repress it with energy, though not always so successfully as not at times to betray its presence by a certain quickness of tone or gesture. Moreover, he displayed great tenacity of purpose, dauntless courage, marked decision of character, an inflexible loyalty to duty, as well as unswerving constancy in the pursuit of any undertaking he had in hand.

His wonderful forbearance in the midst of contradiction and annoyance, and his entire submission to the Will of God—two virtues that distinguished him throughout life—did not at all mean that he was a stoic. As we have said, he was acutely sensitive to pain of any kind. The young catechist of Tilburg, who wept

bitter tears over his failures, grew strong with the passing years, but no whit less tender. By the unusual animation that lit up his features, it was easy to see either that he had converted some great sinner or that he was back from some apostolic journey that had been particularly blessed by God; while the pain he felt whenever his zeal had spent itself in vain on hardened hearts was equally evident.

One day the following lament escaped him: "I have now been working here more than twenty years, and what meagre results I have gained!" Grieving on one occasion over the obstinacy of an Indian tribe he was evangelizing, he said: "There is great room for improvement in the Caribs; were I not convinced that God can do all things, and that, in His infinite mercy, it is within His power to enlighten their minds and change their hearts, I should lose courage."

He manifested a like depth of feeling when preaching, and frequently caused a sensation in his audience by bursting into tears when speaking of the truths of salvation.

Concerning Father Donders' sympathy for the sufferings of others, our readers will recall how in Batavia he did not feel equal to being present at an amputation. And when once a poor man, about to be married and lacking suitable attire for the occasion, was ashamed to beg it, the Servant of God said to him: "Well, since you are too shy to beg yourself, I'll do it for you." The poor fellow never forgot that. On another occasion, meeting in the street a little boy of five who had got lost and had not the faintest notion of the whereabouts of his home, he took the child tenderly by the hand and never stopped questioning him until he had solved the mystery and restored the little fellow to his parents.

With all his recollection and mortification, he was always in the best of humour. Those who knew him spoke repeatedly of his pleasant smile as a child and a young man, a smile that did not go even when he was made a butt for ridicule and insult. Later on, when a priest and a religious, his good-humour never left

him, and made him a delightful companion. He was not at all averse to festivities, and the reader will recall how, on the occasion of the silver jubilee of his priesthood, in 1866, he gave a dinner to the secular clergy and the Redemptorists in Paramaribo. On the 17th September of the ensuing year, remembering how on that day, twenty years before, he had landed in Surinam, he eagerly accepted an invitation, given him by Bishop Swinkels, to sing Mass *coram episcopo* in the town. Great numbers received Holy Communion on the occasion, and his Lordship writes of the event in his diary: "*Gaudium universum.*"

As a child of St. Alphonsus, he had all the genial playfulness that distinguished his holy Father. "He is never done telling me," writes Bishop Schaap, "how greatly edified he is by the spirit of joy that reigns amongst us." He entered thoroughly into the recreations, and laughed heartily whenever he was made the object of bantering and pleasantries. A Constitution of 1854, which forbade smoking, had been relaxed in favour of the Redemptorists in Surinam. Now the Servant of God never tried to be singular in this matter and smoked away like the rest, so that his Superior remarks: "How delightful it is to see Father Donders lighting up his pipe at recreation and puffing away."

His great goodness of heart showed itself in another way—by his gratitude.

As a student, a missionary, and a Redemptorist, he never failed to testify his gratitude to those who did him a service. His affecting good-byes to the President and Professors in the seminary; his touching words addressed to the parish priest, Van de Ven, on the occasion of his last sermon in the church of Tilburg; his warm-hearted letter to Father Vogels, who had been the bearer of the good news of his admission into the seminary—all show that his spirit of thankfulness was deep and enduring.

From Paramaribo he wrote to his old benefactor, Father Van Someren: "I hope Your Reverence will excuse me (for not having written sooner) and will not suspect me of having forgotten. No, Reverend Father,

I can never forget all I owe you, and the sincere friendship with which you have so long honoured me; and so I trust I shall never be untrue to my promise of praying for you and writing from time to time. I feel that distance is no bar to our mutual affection, and that the boundless seas that divide us can never undo or even loosen its bonds."

At the request of the Provincial, Father Anthony, the Director of the Holy Family Confraternity—whose name still lives in the memory of the old people of Amsterdam—had got Father Donders a harmonium for his church in Batavia. The latter writes to the Provincial:

"Most heartfelt thanks for your valuable gift. May God reward you for the trouble you have taken. Last evening, as I was playing the harmonium for the first time, we all said a Rosary together for you, and, for the future, a *Pater* and *Ave* in thanksgiving will be said for your intentions in our church."

Twelve years later, in 1884, he writes as follows to Father Anthony himself: "It appears that your health has not been too good this while past. I want to let you know how I feel for you, for I can never forget all you did for my poor lepers in Batavia a few years ago, when you sent me the harmonium. Indeed I'm no genius at the instrument. Besides, as I have been alone here this long while, the only chance I had of playing was during Benediction, never during Mass; and yet it gave us all great pleasure."

Finally, there was his love for the land that God mapped out for him as the field of his apostolate.

"Oh, how dear the Surinam mission is to me!" he exclaims. "Just think, I am forty-three years here already without ever having left it for a single day. I should not care to leave it either, and may the good Jesus grant me the grace to die in it."

These deep feelings, which made his company so pleasant, but which likewise occasioned him much suffering, went hand in hand with an energy and

resolution that made him ready to undertake any apostolic work and indefatigable in seeing it through.

One might gather from all that has been said that his extraordinary meekness was almost natural, and that its practice cost him little effort. It was quite otherwise. Not that he was hasty or hot-tempered; but he was naturally ardent and impulsive, as he showed by his quick utterance, and still more by the promptitude and decision with which he could, at need, brush aside or surmount the obstacles in his path. The words of reproach that fell—rarely indeed—from his lips as a student; the slight flush that suffused his usually pale countenance whenever he was humiliated; the ardour with which he removed improper pictures and objects of superstition from Catholic homes; the fearless zeal with which he penetrated into Indian or Negro encampments; his indignant denunciations of immorality; the holy anger with which he confronted scandal-givers and put them terror-stricken to flight—all this bespoke a naturally impulsive temperament, which he kept under by virtue, and to which he gave rein only in the cause of God and souls.

This fiery zeal made him truly eloquent at times. Our readers will recall how, in 1844, he addressed an appeal to the Dutch clergy in favour of the poor forlorn mission of Surinam. How he kindles when describing the wretched condition of the slaves in the colony!

"If they but did as much for the well-being and upkeep of our slaves as they do for beasts of burden in Europe, what a change we should see! If I only told you all I have witnessed and heard on this melancholy subject . . . but I had rather say nothing, for it is beyond conception; the very thought of it makes me shudder, and I can only exclaim with a breaking heart: Woe! woe to thee, Surinam, on the great Accounting Day! Yes, woe! woe a thousand times to those Europeans—planters, slave-holders, managers, overseers and officials—to whom this slave population is subject! Woe to those who make fortunes out of the sweat and blood of those unfortunate creatures who have God alone to defend them!"

Yet never did any bitterness, any exaggeration, any self-seeking enter into this zeal of his. If he longed to do good, and if he threw his whole indomitable energy into the doing of it, it was all for God. And what proofs he gave of this tenacity of purpose! Far back in the days of his childhood and youth he yearned for the priesthood, though a thousand and one obstacles stood in the way. Then, no sooner was he ordained, than with a holy passion he flung himself without reserve into the work of converting a whole multitude of pagans —lepers, Indians, Negroes—seeking them out in their plantations or in the depths of forests—and this in spite of criticism and opposition, of ingratitude and seeming failure. He never hesitated an instant when the salvation of a single soul was in question, just as he never wavered when the salvation of the multitude was at stake.

On one occasion he had requested Bishop Schaap, in view of a forthcoming marriage, to grant him certain faculties which, in his opinion, were essential for removing an occasion of sin; but the prelate could not see eye to eye with him in the matter nor accede to his request. Then, convinced that an end should be put to an intolerable situation, he returned to the charge with such persistency that the Bishop, referring to the incident at a later period, could not help remarking: "Really, I could never have thought that such a holy man could have been so obstinate." When we remember his continual requests for alms, which, on one occasion, were the cause of his being shown the door by the Prefect Apostolic, we shall understand what Amarantha Tijdig remarked of him: "The Father never lost courage; no matter how obstinate or ungrateful people were towards him, he kept on preaching at them. And as to jeers and scoffs, he simply paid no heed to them."

No matter how great the danger, he knew not what fear was. He would venture deep into virgin forests, wade through swamps, make his way into the camps of savage Negroes, and face every peril on the water; he never betrayed the slightest fear, and, as the boatmen put it, "kept up their courage in dirty weather." No

risk of infection, no sores, no matter how horrible to look upon, could make him flinch. "One day," relates Elizabeth Schmidt, who knew him long years, "he said to me: 'Don't be afraid of the lepers,' and he set the example of St. Elizabeth before me. And when I said: 'And would you, then, wash these disgusting sores as that Saint did?' he replied: 'Of course, and why not?'"

Once he realized that God expected him to do anything in particular, neither mockery, nor threats, nor violence could turn him aside from achieving it. What is more—his very love for prayer and mortification, his zeal for souls, his longings to do good—in a word, the noblest aspirations of his heart were all sacrificed on the altar of obedience the moment he heard it said: God wishes it. The sequel will show us striking instances of this.

It would be wrong to attribute to nature or temperament, either entirely or mainly, the high deeds we are recounting. His complete submission to the good pleasure of God was far indeed from being the outcome of mere philosophy, nor was his love for his neighbour nothing but philanthropy and altruism. Building on the foundation of the natural man—in his case so fair and richly endowed—grace raised within him the spiritual structure whose proportions we so admire; while, on the other hand, that same grace met with a generous co-operation, by which his ear was ever open to the voice of God and his will ever ready for sacrifice, seeking support and consolation, throughout his long career of suffering and toil, in faith and charity alone.

What gave him no rest, and what egged him on relentlessly, was his vivid perception of the truth that Jesus Christ died on the Cross for each and every soul without exception; that for each and every soul it is a question of a blissful or a woeful eternity; that with God there is no acceptance of persons—neither of slave nor of free man, neither of white man nor of coloured, neither of leper nor of him that is whole. Hence, he would, if possible, have gone on preaching and exhorting for ever, for ever baptizing and hearing confessions

and distributing Holy Communion, for ever searching for stray or abandoned sheep, even in their most inaccessible hiding-places. Hence, he would have never done praying and suffering and denying and sacrificing himself. Hence, he grieved when he met with failure, only to recover himself at once by calling up all his energies. Hence, he exulted in success, only to hunger after wider conquests and covet greater spoils. Such, in a few words, were the life and the longings of this remarkable missionary.

So far, in support of all we have related, we have let the best-informed witnesses speak. With regard to the twenty years—the last of his life—he spent in the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, we have still more exact documentary evidence at our disposal in the reports sent at various periods to the General of the Redemptorists by successive Superiors of the Servant of God.

We have already seen what Bishop Swinkels said of Father Donders towards the end of his novitiate. This is what he wrote later on: "To put all in one word, Father Donders is a real saint; he practises virtue in an heroic degree; he is loved and revered as a saint by his confrères, by people in the world, both rich and poor, by good and bad alike."

Bishop Swinkels wrote thus in 1875, the very year of his own holy death, after having studied the Father at his leisure for nine years.

Bishop Schaap writes in 1880:

"The apostolic labours to which Father Donders devoted himself unremittingly since 1842 are a striking proof of his sanctity. Ever since he consecrated himself to the care of the lepers in Batavia, in 1852, he has made himself all to all. He often goes on long journeys for the purpose of visiting the plantations, and even when this means plunging into the densest forests, he never flinches. Even repeated rebuffs on the part of the Indians have never succeeded in daunting the zeal of this truly strong man."

Equally flattering is the report sent by Father Oomen

after his canonical visitation in 1882. The pith of it is taken from the aforesaid report of Bishop Swinkels, the very language being often reproduced. He writes:

"Father Donders shows great leanings towards virtue. With regard to acquired virtues, he practises them all like a real saint to an heroic degree, and this with such delightful simplicity that, while he looks on himself as a mere nobody, he has endeared himself to all—to good and bad, to rich and poor, to the people and to his brethren. He has spent twenty-six unbroken years in Batavia, we may say, and has never manifested the slightest wish to change his abode. Lately, however, when ordered to go to Paramaribo by Bishop Schaap, he naïvely admitted that he found community life much more pleasant than living alone, adding at the same time that he was ready to go wherever obedience sent him. His life is admirable, and we can find no flaw in it. His observance of the Rule could not be more exact. He deserves the fullest trust."

Finally, when, in 1887, Bishop Schaap was preaching the funeral oration of the Servant of God in the cathedral of Paramaribo, he thus concluded: "He was ever an object of veneration in our eyes. Whenever he was leaving for his beloved Batavia, after having spent a few days with us, we one and all, both in public and within the house, spontaneously, and as though urged thereto by some supernatural impulse, fell on our knees and asked his blessing."

In the following chapters, which describe his career as a Redemptorist, we shall see how well deserved was such high praise.

CHAPTER X

BACK IN BATAVIA: THE RELIGIOUS

1867-1883

FATHER DONDERS was not a professed religious two months when he was again on his way to Batavia, his *pleasure-garden*. As the boat drew near, he saw the lepers in crowds—such, at least, as were able to get away —waiting on the shore and greeting him with welcoming cries, which, for all their harshness, sounded sweet in his ears, and told him of their filial gratitude and love. It was the 13th August, 1867, and on that date he resumed with more alacrity than ever the old life of charity and self-sacrifice he had been leading for a decade, and which his novitiate had interrupted. It was to last sixteen years more.

And meanwhile the secular priest had become a religious. Hitherto he had directed his efforts to attaining the ideal of the true priest; he was henceforth to strive with unremitting energy to reach the standard of the true Redemptorist. He will no longer be alone at his post; more often than not he will have a confrère with him. This constant companionship of a member of the religious family to which he now belonged enabled him to become penetrated more and more with the spirit of his holy Founder, while it was to be the means of posterity becoming more closely acquainted with his heroic virtue.

It need scarcely be said that the Servant of God was the object of singular veneration on the part of his brethren. They looked upon it as a great good fortune

to be given to study his beautiful soul so near at hand, with a view to their own spiritual progress; and if we are now in a position to follow his footsteps with more precision and detail, we have them to thank for it.

"From the very first day," says Bishop Schaap, "he behaved like a perfect religious, and that in all things. Never, no, never, could either his Superiors or his confrères detect the smallest fault in him. And so it was with great thankfulness to God—the Author of every good gift—that the community soon realized the treasure of priestly and religious virtue with which it had been enriched. We made no secret of it amongst ourselves: we all took him for our master. He never ceased to be the object of our veneration."

His holy vows were no empty formulæ for Father Donders; they mapped out a definite programme which it was his purpose to pursue.

To begin with his obedience to Rule and Superiors: it was embodied in many beautiful words and acts.

When his director asked him which were his favourite virtues, he replied: "They are all my favourites; obedience, however, and the accomplishment of the Will of God are particularly so." It was God indeed he sought, so that he found his happiness in obedience. "Oh," he said in a letter to his Provincial, "how good God is to him who recognizes His divine Will in the will of Superiors, and who, for this motive, obeys and cheerfully submits in all things! What a comfort to be able to say: I am doing what God wants me to do." And because he read this holy Will in every rule, the smallest was a sacred thing in his eyes.

Thus, for instance, he kept inviolably to the order of the day drawn up by the Rule. Father Verbeek enlarges on this when writing to his Provincial in Holland, in the November of 1867:

"Here I am back again in Batavia with dear Father Donders. The first time I stayed here was eight years ago, and the second, soon after, was when I came to recruit after a protracted and serious illness. We are living over the church in apartments fairly large indeed,

but infested with vermin and rats, which we have no hope of getting rid of. We have a population of about 160 to 170 people—adults and children—amongst whom there are 100 lepers, including some bad cases. A number of them lead the most scandalous lives.

"A word about our eremitical life. We rise punctually at five. When in the world, I found it dreadfully hard to get up so early. In Batavia, I must admit—and I thank God for it—that it does not cost me anything. Father Donders is a model for me in everything. Whenever I do not happen to hear the bell, the next moment he is standing by me waking me, or I hear him coming over. He is punctual in everything. I am told that during the night—perhaps every night for that matter—he goes to pay a visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. This I found out myself one morning when, on coming down first to the church, I noticed that the door I had closed the night before was open."

What Father Verbeek says on this characteristic devotion of the Servant of God is corroborated by other confrères, who are still more explicit.

Father Van Coll speaks expressly as follows: "Often and often I heard him slipping down very quietly, during the night, to the church, where he would remain some time." Another, Father Van Vlokhoven, speaks in a similar way. Says a third: "One night, at a very late hour, I found him on his knees before the Tabernacle." And a fourth: "A Father who was going on a sick-call one night found Father Donders in the church. The Servant of God looked embarrassed, but, after rising a moment, he went on his knees again."

In the cemetery, in a recess formed by five palm-trees, was a large cross, in the shadow of which those missionaries who died in Batavia slept their last sleep. Not infrequently would the Father make his way there, in the middle of the night, to pray and ask God to give him the two virtues that distinguished his predecessors, viz., the love of Himself and zeal for souls.

Let us again hear Father Verbeek describing the daily life of the two Redemptorists in Batavia.

"As soon as we have dressed, we go down to the church to visit Jesus. At half-past five, we go upstairs again for meditation. At half-past six and seven, we say our two Masses, during which the people recite the Rosary aloud, followed by other prayers. At nine, Father Donders gives the instruction to the handful of children we have here, as the grown-ups are sent into the town by orders of the Government, through fear of infection. He then begins the visiting of the sick. This devolves on me every time Father Donders is away visiting the plantations or the Indians—which means ten or twelve days in the month, sometimes even more. After the midday Angelus comes the Particular Examen, which is followed by dinner. At half-past one, the siesta; at two, Vespers, visit to the Blessed Sacrament and the Blessed Virgin, and the Way of the Cross. At three, spiritual reading and meditation. At four, Matins. At half-past six, private prayer until the people in the church have finished their night prayers. We then say the Rosary with the people; next comes the instruction for the adults, followed by one or more hymns in Nigger English, for singing is their very life. 'Ah, if singing could get them into heaven,' Father Donders says, 'not one of them would be left outside.' And thus our days and weeks are passed."

Such was the order of the day followed by the two solitaries, in conformity with the Rule of their Institute and the duties of their state. They adhered to it with scrupulous exactitude, as Bishop Schaap declares after making the canonical visitation of the Vice-Province in 1871:

"Our two dear confrères in Batavia (Fathers Donders and Odenhoven) go through all their spiritual exercises with religious punctuality, not excepting the afternoon meditation—no small matter in Surinam." In his report of this same canonical visitation, the Provincial does not hesitate to write thus to Father General: "In Batavia are Father Odenhoven and the venerable—I might almost say, the saintly Father Donders."

Even the traditional practices of supererogation handed down from the time of St. Alphonsus were faithfully gone through by this perfect religious. Father Van Vlokhoven, who lived with him from May, 1871, to June, 1873, gives us these details:

"Father Donders makes the Way of the Cross every day; about half-past eleven he says the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin. Nothing but his greater abstemiousness distinguishes him from others at table; water is his ordinary drink. As soon as the afternoon exercises are over, he is often seen working hard in the garden. Towards evening he reads something more from the Lives of the Saints, which he finds an excellent means of keeping awake."

So great was his love for obedience that strict regular observance became a positive joy to him. On his way back from a sick-call one night, he began to quicken his pace lest he should be late for the discipline; and when he found he was in time, he exclaimed gleefully: "Good! we managed that well."

Such obedience on his part was all the more meritorious as he was already advanced in years when he entered the Congregation, and this necessarily meant breaking away from habits of long standing. Besides, he was a member, not of a numerous community in which order is maintained almost automatically, but one of a very small staff of a missionary station.

A like spirit of faith inspired his exact obedience to Superiors. While a secular priest, he had been a long time completely his own master in Batavia; but now he spent the first years of his religious life in subjection to others. He even had to submit to confrères much inferior to himself in age and experience. Father Romme, who became his Superior in June, 1870, writes of him:

"Though he was my senior by a score of years, and had twenty-five years more experience of colonial life than I, yet he always obeyed me with the greatest promptitude and with the simplicity of a child. The more onerous, even, were the duties I laid on him, the

more pleased he seemed to be. Not that human nature never revolted, but he never paid the slightest heed to its dislikes."

The mere thought that anything was God's Will made him overcome his natural shyness and sense of his own inferiority. "One day," Sister Mary Olive, a Franciscan nun in Paramaribo, relates, "the Servant of God paid us a visit in company with Bishop Schaap. When we were all together in the chapel after Benediction, the Bishop turned towards us and said: 'Father Donders is now going to address us.' We pitied him, as we knew how shy he was, and were aware he was not a good speaker. He spoke for about half an hour, but I saw clearly he was doing violence to himself, and his obedience edified us greatly. One evening the Bishop put him to a still severer test. 'To-morrow,' he said, 'during High Mass, Father Donders will be good enough to say a few words.' The Father at once consented, though much taken aback and though it was very hard on him to preach in Dutch, as he hardly ever spoke anything but Nigger English."

His obedience was so perfect that for its sake he renounced even what he held most dear—mortification and work for souls. From the moment he entered the Congregation he never performed a single act of external mortification without the consent either of his Superior or of his director.

"Bishop Schaap," says Father Romme, "had forbidden him to fast on account of his age and his illness. The Father, however, thinking he had regained his strength, begged me most earnestly to intercede with his Lordship in his behalf, and have the prohibition removed. I thought it wiser not to intervene, and he at once acquiesced."

It was the same with regard to his apostolate. "He never undertook anything," Superiors declare, "without being authorized to do so."

Thus, for instance, he visited the Maratakka Indians but once a year, though he longed to evangelize them oftener. In 1881 he wrote to the Provincial

begging the favour of being allowed to return a second time; but on his request not being acceded to, he replied: "I thank you, Very Reverend Father, for your letter concerning Maratakka. I entirely submit. I will put off this journey, then, until God is pleased to arrange otherwise and send us reinforcements. May the divine Will be done in all things."

One day, when just about to leave for the Para River, he got orders not to approach the Indian camp. On his return home, he said to the Superior: "As I had no leave, I did not go near the Indians; at the same time, I should just like to mention the matter, in order that you may kindly think it over." Thus, even his holy and burning zeal was laid on the altar of obedience.

Nor was this entire submission a short-lived virtue with him, belonging to his early days as a religious: he practised it to the end. His daily words and acts are there to prove it. In the January of 1875, he writes from Batavia to his Superior in Paramaribo: "With the help of God's grace, it is and always shall be my aim to follow Your Reverence's advice, so that I may live here below in more intimate union with God, until I have the happiness of dying a good death and living in eternal union with Him."

Strong as were the ties that bound him to Batavia, he maintained a state of utter indifference with regard to possible changes. His Provincial, Father Oomen, was able to declare in all truth that "the Father was always happiest and most contented where obedience placed him. If he were in Batavia, he hoped to die there; if in Paramaribo, he desired to remain there; when he was in Coronie, he longed to end his days there, and he was ever ready to go where obedience sent him."

We learn of this holy indifference from his own lips. On the day he had to leave Batavia at the bidding of his Bishop, he said to his poor lepers: "You see, we are under the Bishop's jurisdiction, and we must obey." When asked in Paramaribo if he would like to return to Batavia, he replied: "As God pleases. The Will of God, the Will of God."

No wonder, then, that his confrères are unanimous in extolling such obedience. Bishops Swinkels and Schaap, Fathers Van Coll, Bossers and Romme, Brothers Pius and Nicasius—all are at one in declaring that not only was he never known to infringe the smallest rule, but that never was a word of murmuring or criticism concerning any decision taken by Superiors ever heard to escape his lips. The same faith that inspired obedience such as this to those whom God placed over him, inspired him likewise with the deepest veneration and the most filial affection towards them. When, in 1871, Bishop Schaap made the canonical visitation of Surinam as Provincial, he paid a visit to Batavia.

"We anchored," he says, "opposite the church, between five and six in the afternoon. Our dear confrères, Fathers Donders and Odenhoven, were awaiting us on the landing-stage, surrounded by a crowd of about a hundred or a hundred and fifty lepers. We had scarcely stepped ashore when the two Fathers fell on their knees and asked their Superior's blessing; then, at a sign from Father Odenhoven, the whole crowd broke into a hymn to the Blessed Virgin. I can never cease thanking God for the joy I experienced at that moment. . . . I had made up my mind to leave next day, but Fathers Donders and Odenhoven pressed me so hard to stay that I was prevailed upon to prolong my visit a little."

The purity that distinguished the boy shone with a special lustre in the priest and the religious. "Everything about him," says Father Startz, "was in keeping with modesty the most austere." When going his rounds, he usually kept his eyes cast down, and the little girls in the school were surprised and impressed on noticing that this priest never gazed at them.

Brother Pius gives us a remarkable instance of this modesty. "One day," he relates, "I went and told him that some women wished to speak to him. He at once put on his spectacles. Some time after, happening to notice these same spectacles lying on the table, I took them up to have a look at them, and then

I discovered that the glass had been scratched all over."

He declared war on idleness and softness in any shape; prayer, work and mortification were his weapons, though he did not carry off his triumphs without a fight. He admits having experienced temptations against the holy virtue, especially during prayer, and, more particularly, while saying his Office; but with God's grace he always came off victorious. He gradually became so inured to this sort of warfare that he developed a certain insensibility even to what would be a natural incentive to passion.

"What shocks us most among the Indians," says Father Verbeek, "is their lack of clothing; and yet this is just what Father Donders does not even notice, he assures us." However, he was never done urging the Indians and the Negroes dwelling in the forest to clothe themselves decently; and he notes with satisfaction that "the children who have been baptized already wear some clothes when coming to the church," and that "a sense of propriety is beginning to manifest itself, even amongst the adults, and is inducing them to wear clothes."

He gladly procured clothes for them himself, nor did he hesitate at need to make inroads on his own scanty wardrobe. Whenever an outrage on public decency came under his notice, he was fired with a holy indignation, and he who was usually so meek broke out into threats in a voice that quivered with emotion. Those who observed him long and closely declare that he undoubtedly preserved intact the lily of his purity, and that nobody ever noticed in him the smallest departure from the demands of the strictest modesty.

What Father Donders thought of his vow of poverty, as well as what store he set by it, not only for its own sake but also on account of the peace it brings in its train, we learn from a letter to a near relative. He wrote:

"Be comforted by the thought that Our Saviour became poor voluntarily for our sakes, that He lived

and died in extreme poverty, and that He has declared those blessed who are poor in spirit, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Bear patiently, therefore, with your indigence, and endure it for the love of God; one day you will be rich in heaven. I am poor myself—and I rejoice at it—by virtue of my religious profession, so that I possess nothing and may dispose of nothing."

The effects of this poverty, such as patched and faded garments—though never torn or dirty ones—poor furniture, frugal fare, well-thumbed books, privations of all sorts when travelling—these things he accepted with calm and contentment. He was ever ready, too, with some pretext or other to satisfy his love for poverty. Whenever, for instance, the food was none too plentiful, his health, he would remark, was all the better of it. Whenever there was any shortage in what came in from the town or in what the Rule allowed, he assured people that he had quite enough.

In one thing, he owns, he did feel the pinch of poverty, viz., in the limit it set to his almsgiving. He had always reckoned amongst his sweetest joys that of giving away his little belongings to the poor. But now that his vow of poverty had deprived him of the free disposal of his goods, and that his vow of obedience put a check upon his bounty, his compassion for the poor became a source of real torture. So complete, however, was the sway exercised by grace over nature that he succeeded in conquering himself even in this, as the following incident shows.

While he was a secular priest, his garden was thrown open to all comers from the village, who helped themselves at will to its fruit. Once he became a religious, of course, this could no longer go on. Therefore, when the poor, in accordance with their long-standing custom, entered his garden, he would call out in a kindly voice: "Hallo! You can't do that any more. Wait a bit. I must get leave from the other Father." An old woman, who had been the object of his charity on many occasions, one day asked him for an alms. "Why, my dear good woman," he replied, "I am as poor

as yourself now, and have nothing more to give you." He managed to get her something from the Superior all the same.

Like every Redemptorist, Father Donders, in addition to the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, had taken the vow and oath of perseverance in his Institute until death. His correspondence goes to show that this grave obligation and his anxiety to be true to it were much in his thoughts. He hedged it round with the fourfold rampart of humility, exact observance, daily prayer to Jesus, Mary and Alphonsus, and filial affection towards the Congregation. He writes to his Provincial, in 1881, on coming out of his annual retreat:

"Oh, how good God is to those who seek Him! Daily He makes me realize more and more the great happiness that is mine in being called to the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. May God and His holy Mother grant me the grace to persevere in my holy vocation and in the constant striving after religious perfection."

Community life, whose sweets he tasted during the all too short period of his novitiate, and which certainly should be numbered amongst the most precious possessions of a religious, never ceased, from the day of his profession, to be the object of his desires. Not that his labours in Batavia lost any of their relish for him, or that he did not sufficiently appreciate the society of his confrère there; but, as he explained many a time to his Superiors, he longed to be edified by the community, to humble himself before them, and to hear words of kindly counsel from their lips. And so he never passed through Paramaribo without calling on the Superior. "In Batavia," he said to him, "I have nobody to point out my faults to me; please let me accuse myself in public before the community, and give me a penance." He would then accuse himself of certain faults—mere faults of inadvertence—with as much compunction as though they had been great crimes.

"Sometimes," says a witness, "at the bidding of

Bishop Schaap, he gave a conference to the community, and it was plain how much he appreciated our happiness of living a family life. But what was quite unforgettable was the humility and modesty with which he addressed us on these occasions."

From this love of his for community life sprang a delicacy and tenderness of feeling that lent much charm to his society. He had a deep and real affection for each of his confrères, and regarded each one of them as the child of his mother the Congregation. During recreation there was a touch of playfulness about him. He was the first to laugh at the witticisms levelled at himself, and took bantering in the best possible part. In short, no one could be at all intimate with him without at once recognizing his good nature.

If he never took anything in bad part, neither did he ever show affection for any one of his brethren more than another. On one occasion, his director touched on the subject of his relations with his confrères: "As far as I know," said Father Donders, "I feel no aversion for anybody; neither do I entertain any particular friendship for anyone, and I wish that all may become saints."

To do his brethren a service was a real joy to him. His companion, Father Startz, was rather partial to a certain kind of fruit called *couma-couma*, which was not easily procured. Now Father Donders was aware of this, and he would wander deep into the forest, accompanied by Rups, the servant-man, in order to get some, and would never come back without a plentiful supply, which he insisted on carrying himself.

"Though extremely hard on himself," said the same Father Startz, "Father Donders was most agreeable and obliging towards others; he is kindness itself. . . . I feel really happy in the company of this holy confrère."

And not Father Startz alone, but all his confrères paid him the same tribute, many calling him a saint even during his lifetime. More than once, when he visited the Paramaribo community, Bishop Schaap told him to bless the Fathers and Brothers—a privilege that

belongs to Superiors alone—the Bishop himself, according to an eyewitness, going down for his blessing, on one occasion, in the middle of recreation and before the whole community.

The outstanding charity of this holy priest would not be seen in all its splendour were we not to chronicle certain incivilities of which a certain confrère made him the object. What is rather unusual in such cases, the confrère himself is the chronicler. He writes:

"I never in all my life came across anyone who had such contempt for himself as Father Donders. We used to turn this to account to tease him. Thus, for instance, we would tell him, amongst other things, that it was quite clear Bishop Schaap had perpetrated the biggest blunder ever known in the history of Surinam the day he received such an odd fish into the Congregation —one who had been a good-for-nothing servant-boy and who could never get on in the seminary. Now the delight the Father took in this strange compliment was so keen that he would actually rub his hands with glee."

That was not all. One day this same Father visited Batavia without sending word, and, not finding Father Donders at home, took it into his head to repeat the dose. He tells the story himself: "The Father was the only one at this period who used to visit the Indians in their camp. He entertained great hopes of the conversion of the Caribs, studied their language, and so on. Now I just thought how he would look if he were suddenly told that his trouble all went for nothing. When he came home in the evening, he appeared rather surprised on seeing me. I said to him straight off: 'You've got to pack up, my friend, and decamp, and go back to town as soon as possible.' He made no reply and did not even seem to wonder. We went to bed. Next morning, as I was walking up and down in front of the church, he met me and said: 'When am I to start for Paramaribo?' I burst out laughing. 'Well, well, and so I took you in! You stay where you are. What on earth could his Lordship

want with you there?' And so the little joke ended." We need only add that the joker afterwards left the Congregation and that, at the diocesan process, the judges characterized him as "a cranky and eccentric personage."

Now it must not be thought that such invincible meekness and such superhuman patience cost the man of God no effort to acquire. As the *Promoter of the Faith* brought out, Father Donders did not escape the assaults of his angry passions any more than did the rest of men, and his picture would be incomplete were we to pass over certain facts to be found in the voluminous dossier of the sworn depositions which the same *Promoter of the Faith* considered it his duty to urge against the heroicity of his meekness.

"Sometimes," says a witness, "I saw him get indignant with the servant and rebuke her smartly for sitting during Mass." Says another: "The Servant of God was most zealous for the decency and beauty of the Lord's House. One day, when he asked the people in Batavia to clean out the church and when they were taking their time about it—nothing to wonder at in the case of lepers—I saw him get very angry, and I said to myself: 'And so even saints get angry!'" Says a third: "Twice he had insisted on there being a sufficient number of altar-breads in the chapel, and I had forgotten all about it. He then reminded me, and in tones that were not at all in keeping with his wonted calm. It was the only time I ever saw him lose his temper."

Out of the declarations of one hundred and nineteen witnesses at the process, there is all that could be urged against the patience of the Servant of God! Their testimony makes two things abundantly clear: first of all, the extreme care the Church takes in scrutinizing the conduct of such of her children as are put forward for the honours of canonization; and, secondly, the mastery these heroes of the Christian life gained over their insurgent nature by means of divine grace, in spite of the frequent uprisings of their passions; for, for the one inordinate movement of anger that works its

way to the surface of their souls, what countless storms must shake the hidden depths below!

One distinguishing feature of Father Donders' charity was that it never suffered anyone to be bored or burdened by his piety. When in company, his recollection was never embarrassing, his punctuality never put people out; austere as he was towards himself, he was nothing but indulgence towards others, and, as circumstances demanded, he would either forgo his practices of supererogation or hide them.

It has been said more than once that Father Donders' sanctity was typically Dutch; that is to say, in nothing extraordinary, but perfect in the ordinary. We have no wish to gainsay this, if by "nothing extraordinary" no more is meant than the absence of visions, raptures, and striking miracles. At the same time—we are entitled to ask—does not this life of his assume a character distinctly extraordinary—and extraordinary even to heroism—when we see it lived unfalteringly for twenty, thirty consecutive years, amongst a people hideously disfigured and infected, under a fiery tropical sky, and especially, as Father Verbeek brings home to us, when everything in the climate and surroundings conspires to give rise to endless occasions of suffering and sacrifice? Let us hear Father Verbeek:

"Our foes here are pretty numerous. To begin with, there are the bats, who are never done, night and day, brushing against our ears. Father Donders remarked to me the other day that he would not be surprised if we had fully five hundred of them ensconced under the roof; so you can imagine how the place is infested by these ill-omened creatures. Then there is the *marabonze*, a species of wasp very prevalent here, whose stings cause intolerable pain; then there are the cockroaches, who spare nothing in the house and make their way into the smallest crevices; finally, we have the chigoes and every species of mosquito. Besides all this, we have endless bother with our Negroes, who are never done wrangling over trifles and make the place a perfect bedlam with their cries and abuse, which we are not always successful in quieting."

Now all this alone—it must be admitted—would constitute a fairly stiff penance, and it was a constant one. But neither all this, nor all the mortifications the observance of his Rule entailed, nor even all that the duties of his state and the climate brought in their train, could quench the thirst for sacrifice that burned within the soul of this truly crucified man, and, to the day of his death, he imposed a great deal of voluntary mortification on himself.

Thus he was never known to complain of the climate, nor was he ever seen making use of a sunshade. He never leant back when seated. Unless charity or propriety called for it, he never ate or drank out of meals. He showed utter indifference to what the old Negress Cornelia put before him. When Father Oomen asked Cornelia during the canonical visitation how she got on with Father Donders, she replied: "Oh, not well at all indeed; he does not take the slightest notice of what I cook for him; everything is always 'good, too good in fact.'"

All those who were fortunate enough to spend some time in his society are unanimous in remarking his extraordinary abstemiousness. Unless at the request of the Bishop, or to avoid singularity, he never took beer. On Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, his only breakfast consisted of a little coffee. Father Verbeek tells us that he abstained from meat during the entire Lent—no small matter in a tropical country.

Certain penitential practices we should never have known of—so careful was he to conceal them—had not chance come to our rescue. "One day I landed in Batavia," says Father Van Coll—it was in 1872—"and I was put into Father Donders' room, as he was away. That night, when getting into his bed, which looked comfortable enough on the outside, my legs came into unpleasant contact with blocks of gnarled wood." Thus did the man of God deny himself every comfort, even during the short hours of the night, when nature called for its well-earned rest.

Father Bossers, who knew him intimately, thus describes his spirit of mortification:

"In the interests of truth, I must say that Father Donders was a mortified man. We readily admit, of course, that to a certain extent people may practise a purely natural mortification: education, temperament, circumstances may make this a comparatively easy matter. But this does not at all meet Father Donders' case. If we look more closely at the manner and the motive of his constant and extraordinary mortification, we shall be compelled to regard it as clearly supernatural and almost heroic. Having to work as a missionary, and being a man with a naturally sound constitution, he had to eat well, and it could not escape the eye of a close observer that, naturally speaking, he ate and drank with relish. When in community and in company, he let very little of his spirit of mortification appear, and he was wont to be guided, as far as possible, by the behaviour or the wishes of others. Whenever he took his meals alone, he invariably chose what was less palatable. Thus it was noticed on many occasions that whenever food varying in quality was set before him—for instance, fresh bread and stale, hard musty bread or bread that was soft and appetizing—his choice fell on the musty bread, which he would scrape, or on the hard and stale. When living alone in Batavia, if he knew some titbit was in the house, which was being forgotten by the servant, he would never say a word about it, much as he might wish for it. He was very fond of chocolate and kept a supply of cacao in the house; yet he would rather sell it than gratify his taste or put the servant to the trouble of preparing it. He was never heard complaining of the lack of any article of food, or that it was badly cooked. When alone, his ordinary drink was water. When going on his visits to the plantations or the Indian camps, he brought a supply of wine and beer with him; but he usually drank river water himself, and gave the beer to the boatmen and the Indians—doing this, of course, only as far as obedience allowed him, once he had become a member of the Congregation. Up to his seventy-fifth year he rigorously kept all the fasts, both of the Rule and of

the Church, and not until he had reached that age did he take a slice of bread and butter for breakfast, at the bidding of his Superior. During the last years of his life, he slept at night on the bare boards. Whenever circumstances allowed, both in Batavia and in Coronie, he took the discipline almost regularly morning and night. Practically every morning he wore a little iron chain furnished with sharp points. When visiting and attending the lepers, he kept his natural dread and disgust so well in check that neither in his speech nor in his manner of acting did he betray the slightest sign of either. To sum up, a life such as this—solitary for the most part—of unremitting toil, whose monotony was relieved only by numerous journeys in an uncomfortable boat and through all sorts of perils; a life spent in hourly contact with an ignorant, immoral and ungrateful people; a life such as this, we say, lived with unflagging persistency and courage, is scarcely possible without an unusual amount of superhuman virtue and a self-denial practised to an extraordinary degree."

Humility shines bright throughout the whole career of the Servant of God. We have already recorded many instances of it. Let us gather it from his own lips. Speaking to Superiors, he says:

"Sometimes, though rarely, I get thoughts of pride; but, with God's grace, I banish them at once." He writes to the Ladies of the Blessed Sacrament in Tilburg: "His Lordship and my confrères maintain that they have me to thank for your great kindness to the mission in Surinam. Tilburg, as they put it, is not unmindful of Batavia, since Father Donders comes from there. But indeed I find it hard to believe that. It is so long now—about forty-two years—since I left Tilburg. Who on earth could still remember the poor young man of those days? And yet I am ready to believe it all the same, as it is my Superior who says it; however, I must then express my deep and genuine gratitude for the magnificent gift you have sent me."

This humility made him eschew all singularity.

"He made it a rule," says Father Van Coll, "to do as everybody else did and never to be singular. Whenever he received a visitor, he always saw that all his wants were supplied. When offered refreshments himself, he accepted them with simplicity, even though it meant running counter to his practices of mortification. It is no exaggeration to say that he would rather be looked upon as imperfect than do the least thing that would make him appear extraordinary.

"Here is something the writer of these lines often saw. Whenever even a distant allusion to any of his good qualities was made in his presence, Father Donders would take up his glass and empty it at one gulp, as much as to say: 'You see, I'm not the holy man you take me for.' He fasted three days a week, the whole year round; and it was apparently to divert the attention of his visitors from this act of penance that on such days he smoked his pipe before everybody, giving them to understand that even he, in spite of his advanced years, still needed this relaxation. Apart from this, he smoked very little; but when in company with others, he acted as others did in everything allowable."

"Happening on one occasion," another witness says, "to remark to him that he had a good appetite, he replied: 'That's true, but really I could not hold out otherwise in these tropical countries, and especially I should never be able to fast.'" Sometimes Bishop Schaap would remark with a laugh, "My dear Father, holy people don't eat like that." Father Donders would then take another helping, so that the Bishop would exclaim: "Oh, I say, that's really beyond the beyonds."

One of his admirers thus summarizes what many noticed:

"He took neither meat nor soup, on the pretext that the former was 'too tough' and the latter 'too salty.' He did not take wine because, as he said, 'he preferred water'; he never drove off the dreadful mosquitoes, because, as he said, 'he did not feel their bite'; he breathed in the sickening atmosphere of the

leper huts without manifesting the least disgust, assuring people that 'he was used to it.' When nursing the sick he took no precautions, just as if he did not know that leprosy was extremely malignant and contagious. Whether he had a hundred listening to him or no more than two, he displayed the same earnestness when preaching. He spent himself lavishly, and for the sake of a single soul would have died at his post. Whenever anyone told him that the heat of the tropics required the midday siesta, he would reply that 'he did not feel in the least tired' and that 'it was his way to keep on working quietly.' He was a foe to all singularity and lived the common life, seemingly doing as everyone did about him."

He concealed his corporal austerities as much as possible. "There is an old trunk in his room," Father Startz writes to his Provincial, "and whenever I go into his room and catch him rummaging in it, he shuts it at once. It is probably there he puts away the instruments with which he chastises his withered body.

We have already spoken of his love for prayer. On entering the school of St. Alphonsus, the Doctor and Apostle of prayer, the Servant of God redoubled, if possible, his zeal for this holy exercise. At the risk of repeating ourselves, we will give here what Father Bossers wrote on the subject in the obituary notice:

"In addition to the time prescribed for meditation and prayer by the Church and the Rule, he gave a whole hour to prayer, morning and evening, before the Blessed Sacrament, at least when he was at home. When the hour was drawing near for some common act either in the oratory or in the church, he would be in his place before the bell rang in order to prepare for that act by a few prayers. He had leave to spend a considerable time at night before the Blessed Sacrament, and God alone knows how many hours he passed communing with the Infinite Goodness during his years of solitude in Batavia and on his numerous and sometimes distant journeys. His aspirations were frequent. Each time the clock struck at recreation, he was seen moving his

lips and saying a brief prayer, probably the *Hail Mary*. Whenever conversation turned on worldly topics, such as the news of the day, he either remained silent or—which often happened—fell asleep. But as soon as pious subjects, like the life of a saint or the Church or the Papacy, were broached, he woke up, listened eagerly, and gladly joined in the conversation. To a very advanced age he kept up the practice of praying on his knees or walking slowly up and down in the church. The faded and worn flooring of the centre passage in the churches in Batavia and Coronie bear mute witness to his perambulations. When living in Batavia, he would drop on his knees at the first sound of the *Angelus*, even in the middle of the street. These are but isolated instances of his devotion, but we may safely say that, except for certain details, his intercourse with God remained substantially the same."

We are told that whenever he entered or left a house, he was wont to say a *Glory be to the Father* or some aspiration in a low voice, that his lips moved constantly in prayer as he went through the streets, and that his rosary was always in his hand. The following incident speaks eloquently of his love for prayer and meditation.

"Whenever the Father was about to leave for a journey," Brother Clement relates, "and had taken his place in the boat beside Bishop Schaap, he used to open the conversation, out of deference and charity towards his prelate. His Lordship, knowing how the man of God longed for prayer, would then say: 'Father, don't mind me,' and then, without further pressing, Father Donders would take his prayer-book from his pocket and begin his devotions. He usually said his prayers in Dutch."

"Such a spirit of prayer is all the more admirable," Father Bossers observes, "as the Servant of God seems not to have been fitted for contemplation either by nature or grace. His intercourse with God seems rather to have been marked by dryness. The Sovereign Master evidently did not think well of granting His Servant those illuminations and delights which draw

the soul towards Himself, until it becomes absorbed, so to speak, in contemplation. Father Donders went in far more for vocal than for mental prayer, strictly so called, and to revive his piety and give it a fresh impulse, he would turn to his beads or his spiritual book, or to some formula of prayer or some private devotion."

What Father Donders himself said one day to his Superior on the subject is the best confirmation of all this: "If you ask me whether I am dry or fervent in prayer, I answer that from time to time I am fervent, but that dryness is my habitual state. The best I can do, then, is to humble myself before God at my inability even to think a good thought without His grace; or, following out Your Reverence's advice, to go through the Stations of the Cross mentally. This is what I generally do during the evening meditation."

Father Bossers, however, thinks that the prayer of his holy confrère was not altogether without spiritual consolation.

"It is likely," he writes, "that at certain more favourable moments, during the silent hours of the night, for instance, his divine Master allowed him to hear His voice more distinctly, illumined his mind with more penetrating light, and enlarged his heart with an unwonted inrush of His love. Certain confrères, regarding it as permissible to watch him occasionally at night, both in Batavia and in Coronie, noticed him, by the light of the sanctuary lamp, kneeling on the altar steps."

Father Startz thus sums up this subject: "Prayer was the food and breath of his soul; he was always praying. In a word, I must state that, during the three years I spent with him at the leper settlement, I never noticed the slightest departure in his conduct from the practice of the priestly and religious virtues, or the smallest irregularity. One would think that in his case the order original sin had troubled in man had been completely restored, so unbroken was the sway he

exercised over his faculties. Hence his whole personality breathed a heavenly peace."

On a few rare occasions, those who lived with him noticed that God—from time to time at least—drew His faithful Servant towards the delights of mystic union. One day, in Batavia, they saw him kneeling at the communion rails, motionless, with his head on his breast; and though they called and shook him, he remained in the same attitude, until at last he came forth from his rapture and raised his head again, heaving a deep sigh.

On Good Friday this passionate lover of Jesus Crucified was beside himself, we might say. On that day he was no longer the same man, and his usually pale face shone with a light that transfigured. On two occasions—the first when he was still a secular priest, the second after he had become a religious—he was seen under the influence of extraordinary emotion during the ceremonies of the day. He was holding the crucifix in his hands and was singing the *Ecce lignum Crucis*, when suddenly he paused and remained absolutely motionless for a whole quarter of an hour. He looked the living image of Jesus Crucified. The people were dumbfounded and kept whispering: "What can be the matter with our Father?"

This happening looks like a reward for the virtue in which he excelled the most—a burning love for Jesus Christ. To love Him with his whole heart, and to offer Him everything through love, especially to offer and immolate himself—such was the all-absorbing passion of his soul.

"I desire greatly to suffer for Jesus, Who has suffered so much for me," he used to say to his Superior; "I think I have the good will, but my works distress me. And what use are virtues if they are not tried? Hence, Very Reverend Father, I beg of you to help me by trying me." And it was with a holy energy that he repeated the sublime words of St. John of the Cross: "I desire to suffer and to be despised for the love of Jesus."

CHAPTER XI

BACK IN BATAVIA: THE APOSTLE OF THE LEPERS AGAIN

1867-1883

His heroic striving after his own perfection did but fan his zeal for the souls of others to a greater flame. The device St. Alphonsus had given to his sons: *Carthusians at home and apostles abroad*, had become his. All day long he prayed, and all day long he worked. "I could do nothing else but pray and visit the sick," he once remarked to a confrère. But for him, visiting the sick meant comforting, admonishing, and reproving them at need, winning them back to God and duty. And how much all this cost him! One morning, on one of those days of fast he had imposed upon himself, he went to hear a sick woman's confession, nearly two miles from the presbytery. On his return, he took the pyx from the church and went straight back to give her Holy Communion. When we remember that he was a man over sixty years of age, toil-worn and fasting rigorously since the previous evening, and that he walked all that distance bare-headed, under a tropical sun, to which no one in that land dares to expose himself—then we shall be in a position to estimate the charity of that act. Nor is this an isolated instance. Those who witnessed it declare that he was ever going about in search of the poor and the leprous who might wish to communicate. It looks as if this act of pastoral zeal was a source of abundant spiritual sweetness for himself. "He alone," says a witness, "without any exaggeration, bore Our Lord to more sick people than did all his confrères combined."

He went through all those spiritual exercises with

his flock which St. Alphonsus so strongly recommends as a means of maintaining the Christian life in a parish. The Confraternity of the Holy Family had its meetings regularly each week. Every evening he said the Rosary aloud in the church, read the visit to the Blessed Sacrament, gave Benediction, or gave a catechetical instruction to the adults. The devotions in preparation for a happy death took place on the fourth Sunday of the month. He also erected the Confraternity of the Living Rosary, and strongly urged his parishioners to join the Third Order of St. Francis.

We are not going to repeat ourselves here on the subject of his tender charity towards the lepers; but really his kindness and self-sacrifice towards these, whom before he used to speak of as "his children," seem to have grown since he became a religious. It is more than likely that resuming his work amongst the lepers, after a break of ten months, was not without its difficulties. Bishop Grooff relates of himself that the first time he had to anoint a leper after his return from the Far East, he experienced the greatest possible repugnance. We quote his account in full. Besides enabling us to picture what Father Donders must have gone through in similar circumstances, it throws a lurid light on the task to which such apostolic men set themselves.

"I must own," he writes, "that the first time I was called upon to exercise my ministry soon after my return to Surinam, I could not help shuddering. I saw before me a leper whose right leg was entirely eaten away. The poor fellow, who was in his agony, occupied a wretched little hovel open to rain and sun alike. The only comfort the dying man had was a log of wood left smouldering to drive off the mosquitoes, and a little river water to quench his burning thirst. Two birds were pecking at his running sores. He was lying on the floor, the pallor of death on his face, banana leaves his only bed, a log his pillow, with nothing but an old strip of sail-cloth for a covering. A sickening odour came from that body which was one huge sore and which showed hardly one sound spot I could anoint. For the

moment—I cannot and will not deny it—I recoiled in horror. I gave the poor creature the consolations of religion as expeditiously as I could. Next morning I was not at all well, the result, I presume, of the strain I went through. I was seized with a violent fever and was laid up for days. As I have had to discharge the same duty since, twice and even three times a week, I have succeeded in getting used to it, thank God, without suffering any ill effects. And thus I am as happy as can be in being able to devote myself to such glorious work." [1]

We have no evidence indeed to show that Father Donders had a like experience on his return to Batavia; but when we remember how extremely sensitive he naturally was, we can scarcely doubt it. Neither can we doubt that he crushed the uprisings of nature just as ruthlessly as did his illustrious predecessor. The following incidents go to prove this.

In November, 1871, Bishop Swinkels wrote: "I left for Batavia on the 4th of the month, as I had to visit my confrères and confirm the lepers. Unpleasant from a natural point of view as this latter function is, supernaturally it is most consoling. I confirmed a woman whose body was one diseased mass and exhaled the odour of a corpse. I managed to stand it only by remaining on a landing between two outer doors, where the poor creature had been laid. And yet, Jesus Christ died for that woman, too!" Now this particular case was one of those Father Donders used to visit and nurse every day.

Let us hear another witness—Bernard Verdijk, a farmer who lived in Surinam in 1877. He says:

"I met Father Donders for the first time in Groningen, on the Saramacca, where he was exercising his ministry. When Mass was over, I heard him give religious instruction to three or four children. I met him in Batavia shortly after. He was standing on the

[1] Since Bishop Wulfingh founded the *Gerard Majella* home in Surinam, which is in charge of the Tilburg Sisters of Charity, great improvements have been effected in the care of the lepers.

LEPER GIRLS OF THE ST. GERARD MAJELLA HOME

shore waiting for the boat. He recognized me at once. 'Ah, 'tis you, the man from Groningen,' he said. When we had exchanged a few words, he parted from me, saying: 'I must be off now to my children.' While taking a walk, I met him again on his knees before a leper. 'What on earth is he at there?' I asked my companion. The latter, who had been some time in Batavia, replied: 'He is dressing the leper's sores; that is one of his usual occupations.'"

The same witness spoke as follows before the ecclesiastical tribunal:

"I declare that I heard in Surinam, both inside the hospital and outside—in fact everywhere—that Father Donders passed for a saint. Everyone spoke of him in terms of the highest praise and said that he was devoting his life to the lepers. I have seen it myself, so I am in a position to speak: he treated them as a loving father would treat his children."

Here one of the judges broke in with the question: "And would you have served the lepers like that?"

The witness replied: "I should never have had the courage; it is too horrible. The Protestant doctor attached to the leper settlement assured me that he never met anyone who led such a life of utter self-sacrifice as Father Donders. I have seen him myself give a drink to a leper who had neither hands nor feet left, and carry him in his arms as a mother would have carried her child."

With good reason did Father Van Vlokhoven, who, for many years, was a witness of all this, exclaim: "Father Donders! why, he was the consolation of the afflicted, an eye to the blind, a foot to the lame, the father of the poor! Oh, Father Donders! you were truly an apostle of charity."

Commiseration such as this touched all hearts. In 1874 the man of God gave an unforgettable and conclusive proof of the ascendency he exercised by quelling a revolt which the civil authorities were powerless to cope with.

In its legitimate anxiety to withdraw the children in Batavia from the danger of contagion, the colonial

Government had taken the extreme measure of ordering their removal and, consequently, their separation from their parents. The whole population was in a ferment at once. Cries and lamentations went up on all sides; even threats were heard, and the mothers resorted to all kinds of expedients to hide their little ones. Accordingly, when the officials appeared on the scene at the leper settlement, they were at a loss what to do. They returned to Paramaribo, but were soon back again bringing the district Commissioner with them. This, however, did not mend matters, as most of the parents persisted in their refusal to hand over the children, with the result that but half of them were given up. Then it was that Father Donders intervened, at the express invitation of the authorities. After having first required the withdrawal of the officials, he approached the disconsolate and threatening crowd. Then, in gentle but solemn words, he set himself to show the reasonableness, as well as the utility of the measure the Government had adopted, and appealed to the parents to abide by it, even in the interests of their own little families. A few moments' silence ensued, and then the poor distressed mothers, bearing their precious burdens, emerged from the crowd and came forward. Not a child was concealed. One parent alone—a Chinaman—held out. With his child in one arm and a large knife in the other, he fled distractedly into the neighbouring wood, crying out: "I'll kill it rather than give it up." No sooner did Father Donders hear of this than he darted after the man and was soon back again with the baby in his arms. The father had handed it freely up. Not only did the Commissioner speak loudly in praise of the attitude taken up by the Servant of God in this matter, but the Government, at the request of this functionary, expressed its deep gratitude to Father Donders for his services.

For his own part, the means the man of God made use of to bring about such results were none other than those he employed in the conversion of sinners, viz., prayer and penance.

"How unhappy sinners are!" he used to say, "how much they are to be pitied! Let us ask God to enlighten and convert them. What a powerful weapon the Apostleship of Prayer is for this end! Do we all belong to it? That's what I should like to know." He wrote: "The necessity and efficaciousness of prayer are being brought daily home to me. However, to save those souls for whom Jesus has not refused His life and His blood, God asks that we, too, do penance and offer sacrifices."

Amongst his own people he adopted the methods so well known to all who have the salvation of their flocks at heart: house-to-house visiting, religious instruction and sodalities. We have already spoken of the daily visits this true pastor paid to the suffering members of his flock. But Father Van Coll tells us something about the services he rendered and the assistance of every sort he brought them on the occasion of these frequent visits.

"Except when obedience ordained otherwise," he writes, "all his belongings became the common property of his parishioners—provisions, the produce of his garden, the water from his cistern. They plagued him for every trifle, and would have made a jack-of-all-trades of him whenever they wanted anything mended. Far from being put out, he let them make any use they liked of him with the best of good will. The Government purveyor, amazed at the huge quantity of matches consumed in Batavia, found out, on investigation, that Father Donders was the general provider of the establishment. It is certain that, strangers to the most elementary good manners as these poor people were, they did not think twice before demanding all kinds of services at his hands, even the most menial; and the man of God, obliging in the extreme, did not shrink from cleaning out their rooms and doing other things of a similar nature. This explains the fact that other priests were afterwards asked to do the same."

With regard to his zeal in instructing the children

and the success he met with, we get some particulars from an account of a journey made by Bishop Schaap :

" I was present at a catechetical instruction given by Father Donders. I heard fairly hard and complicated questions answered with such readiness and accuracy, with such clarity and thoroughness, as to leave our white adult population far behind. But perhaps you will say : ' Oh, Father Donders brought his best scholars forward for the occasion.' I don't think so. *That man*, you must know, has always scorned the prudence of men—that inveterate enemy of God. Besides, as I wished to test it, I entrusted next day's lesson to Father Van Rooij, who, like myself, had come here for the first time. The result was the same—just as excellent."

With regard to sodalities, Father Donders set a great value on the Confraternity of the Holy Family. The meetings took place on Thursday afternoon. But he was not satisfied with its members meeting : he would have them lead truly Christian lives. Whenever any one of them made a slip, he conceived an original plan of bringing him back to the right path. He took his medal from him and hung it on Our Lady's statue or on that of St. Joseph, and this expedient seldom failed to bring about the amendment of the guilty party, besides serving as a warning to the others.

In a country where the pagan element was so strong and where bad Christians abounded, he had to wage an unremitting warfare against superstition and the practice of vain observances in the case of illness and diabolical influence. With this end in view, he instilled into the minds of his flock great confidence in the use of all those salutary means which the Church holds at the disposal of her children, such as holy water, the scapular and the crucifix. " There should be holy water in every hut," he used to say. He never crossed the threshold of a house without looking for the holy water stoup, and as soon as he found it, he would dip his fingers and make the sign of the cross. In treating sores, he recommended the use of holy water

accompanied with confiding prayer, and the event often justified his faith.

An Indian woman had her foot bitten by a snake, and as a result her whole body had swelled. Father Donders was summoned to her bedside. He first anointed her. "She shall not die," he then said, "let us pray and you'll see how powerful prayer is." Then, kneeling down, he began to pour holy water over the foot, praying the while. The woman was perfectly cured and lived for several years. "Believe me," he used to say, "you can do everything with holy water."

Two other things he recommended to his parishioners —the pious wearing of the scapular, and great confidence in the sign of the cross. In moments of great danger, he would make a big sign of the cross before everybody, and many a time his devotion was rewarded in an extraordinary way. He always kept a crucifix on his table and gladly gave away pictures of the crucifixion. Amarantha Tijdig, who had often to summon him at night for sick-calls, was greatly afraid of the dark, especially whenever she had to pass the cemetery. Father Donders gave her a crucifix. "Armed with the cross," he assured her, "you will have nothing to fear."

One of his boatmen witnessed the following incident that occurred on one of his journeys; it looks like a reward for his tender devotion to his crucified Saviour. One day, while sitting in the boat, Father Donders inadvertently let his copper-plated mission cross fall into the water. Without stirring, he just dipped his hand into the water and drew out the crucifix, just as if it had been lying on dry land.

His hatred of sin had increased, if possible, since he became a son of St. Alphonsus, and his war against it had grown more implacable. This naturally told on his preaching, which became more earnest than ever on this subject. In the pulpit he declared his readiness to do penance for every sinner who refused to be converted. "I will go on my knees in the middle of the church," he said, "and let every sinner strike me

I will even offer him the other cheek, on the condition that he be converted, and I will gladly bear it all in expiation of his sins."

His zeal in attacking and removing, if possible, public occasions of sin was just as burning and intrepid.

Amongst the most destructive sources of scandal at the leper settlement at this period were undoubtedly those who had care of the sick and the boatmen landing in Batavia. As if the poor lepers were not sufficiently inclined to evil already—as we have seen—these wretches did not hesitate to cast them headlong into it by organizing evening dances. The Servant of God set his face against this abuse with truly apostolic vigour, only too often alas! to meet with nothing but ridicule and scorn for his pains. He often appeared on the scene of their excesses himself and broke out into reproaches against those panders to vice, but only to be laughed out of the place.

A painful incident of this nature was related to us by a confrère who shared Father Donders' labours in Batavia for some time. One New Year's Eve a number of lepers had got together in a hut for the midnight revel. Clad in a grotesque fashion, they had drawn after them, to the sound of the drum and the accordion, a considerable crowd and, in the midst of a deafening din, were indulging in an improper dance. As the uproar was still going on when midnight had already struck, the Fathers thought they could put a stop to proceedings by their presence, and that common decency would prompt the revellers to disperse. But nothing of the sort occurred. Not one left the spot, and in the midst of general jeers the Fathers were compelled to leave and return home, while the orgy lasted until six in the morning.

Father Donders then resolved to adopt the plan best calculated to effect the conversion of these blinded creatures, viz., the giving of a mission. The general Jubilee of 1875 he considered the most favourable time for the work. He preached the exercises himself, in collaboration with his companion, Father Startz, who thus describes its success in the following report:

" I have the best of news for you, Reverend Father. Availing of the general Jubilee, we have given a mission in Batavia, and the result has been not merely good but brilliant. With very few exceptions the people attended the sermons and other exercises faithfully; what is better still, they prayed and prayed much. Out of a score who had been neglecting their duties and leading scandalous lives, half have returned to God. Thus only ten have persisted in their bad dispositions, being unwilling to renounce the occasion of their sins.

" They had a whole month's preparation for the mission; on two consecutive Sundays I announced and explained all the exercises. It opened on the 10th of this month, in the evening. On the same Sunday, during the High Mass, I said to them: ' This afternoon do not leave your homes; at half-past one the bell will be rung, and then we will go to you bearing the cross of Jesus with us.'

" As a matter of fact, we went from hut to hut at the hour stated. Father Donders carried the large crucifix and held it before them. I spoke a few earnest words in each house, exhorting the inmates to profit by the grace of God.

" The people were dumbfounded at such an unexpected visit and did not know what to say. Many wept, and it was as much as I could do not to do likewise myself. In some houses we heard them praying aloud as we approached; and then, as we entered, they fell on their knees, terror-stricken and exclaiming: ' *Mi caba, mi caba,* I will sin no more, I will sin no more.'

" The whole population, deeply stirred, followed the exercises—Mass and instruction, and the Way of the Cross, in the forenoon; Rosary in the afternoon; the mission sermon in the evening. A few poor cripples, minus legs or feet, were carried to the church three times a day in a little cart, and they held out to the end. Two large scrolls—one showing the Ten Commandments and the other representing hell—were hung from the pillars of the church. During the evening sermon, a large crucifix was placed on the

altar, between four lighted candles. At nine o'clock each evening the bell was rung. The last two days were devoted to confessions, and a general communion brought exercises to a close which wrought such good amongst these poor people."

Two more missions were preached in Batavia—in 1878 and 1881. The Fathers, profiting by experience, decided on giving the latter one in strict conformity with the principles of St. Alphonsus. Accordingly, they invited two other Fathers, who were strangers to the parish, to undertake the work. Father Donders wrote of it to his Provincial:

"I have asked his Lordship to send me two Fathers who will take over entirely the work of preaching and hearing confessions, so that I may keep out of it altogether. The people will thus enjoy the fullest freedom. May God in His goodness grant that they may be all converted, especially the obstinate ones."

Besides the fear of God, which no Christian can do without, Father Donders, true follower of his blessed Father that he was, was particularly careful to instil into souls the most essential virtue of all—the love of God. He exhorted the sick to go to daily Mass and frequent Communion. He did all he could, not only for the cleanliness of God's House, but for its beauty also. If there was one thing more than another calculated to annoy this naturally kind-hearted priest, it was thoughtlessness and irreverence at Mass, or any unwillingness to contribute according to one's means to the maintenance of decency in the sanctuary. When writing to the Ladies of the Blessed Sacrament in Tilburg, he appends a list of things he deems necessary for his church in the way of vestments and ornaments.

"If you can possibly supply all my needs," he says, "you will be doing a work most pleasing to God and you will oblige me greatly, as well as my poor lepers. We will always pray for you in return." And when, in reply to his request, he received a substantial consignment, he wrote an acknowledgment to his

benefactresses in which his humility, his delicate sense of gratitude, and his zeal are equally displayed.

"It is my duty," he writes to the President of the committee, "to tell you, Madame, and all the good ladies, how sincerely and deeply grateful I am. You may be quite sure that in behalf of your association in general and of each of its members in particular, I will knock at the door of the Heart of Jesus, with our sweet Mother Mary as my mediatrix, and ask Him to grant you, Madame, and all your associates, His grace and blessing here below and His glory above.

"May an old man of seventy-five venture to give you a little piece of advice? Amongst all the obligations you have contracted by becoming members of the association, none should be dearer to you or fulfilled with such fidelity and zeal as the visit to Jesus in His divine Sacrament. It is indeed good for us to be there, to pray, to thank, to ask for help in all our needs of soul and body.

"And, my dear kind friends, when you are kneeling there in prayer, please remember an old man, that Our Lord may show him mercy during life, at his death, and at the hour of judgment."

He was no less earnest in enkindling love for Jesus in His Passion in the hearts of his suffering flock. In most of his sermons he returned to the subject of the sufferings and death of his divine Master. He urged the people often to make the Way of the Cross, reflecting the while on the pains endured by Jesus for their love, and it was to facilitate this pious exercise that he left no stone unturned to procure a touching set of Stations. As soon as he had secured what he desired, through the kind offices of the Provincial, he wrote to the latter, on the 17th July, 1876:

"From my heart I thank your Reverence for the beautiful Stations. We erected them solemnly on the 2nd of this month. For your greater consolation and for my own, I am able to tell you that the faithful make the Way of the Cross with greater eagerness than

before. I thank your Reverence also for the colossal and beautiful figure of Christ you sent for our cemetery; as soon as the cross is ready, we will bless it and set it up with all due solemnity."

He taught them to have recourse with confidence to the Divine Heart of Jesus, the source of all love and consolation. On the 16th July, 1875, he wrote as follows to his Superior:

"To-day we had a most solemn consecration to the Sacred Heart. The church was splendidly decorated. All, with very few exceptions, approached the Holy Table. The consecration itself, in accordance with the desire of His Holiness Pius IX, was made with much solemnity. After High Mass, the people, all carrying lighted and decorated candles, went through the formula in their Negro patois. It was a most edifying sight. The doctor and the manager sent in candles. Are we not justified in thinking that the desires of the Sacred Heart of Jesus are fulfilled? Ah, may He, in His infinite mercy, come speedily to the aid of His persecuted Church. May that same holy Mother Church triumph and spread. May all heretics, through this feast, recognize the true Church of Christ and return to her bosom. Fiat! *Deo gratias et Mariæ!*"

We have remarked more than once how this true son of St. Alphonsus taught his people to venerate Mary and put their trust in her. Let us give a further instance.

At the process of beatification, Brother Nicasius made the following deposition: "As I happened to be in Batavia, on one occasion, for the best part of a day, I went to visit the village huts with Fathers Donders and Startz. In each I saw a picture of Our Lady decked with flowers, with such profusion indeed that the walls were almost covered with floral decorations."—"I suppose," one of the judges here interposed, "it was the month of May."—"Pardon me," replied the Brother, "it was the same all the year round."—"I

am convinced," he went on, " that the devotion of those poor people to the Blessed Virgin was kept alive by the words and example of Father Donders, and that it sought expression in that truly remarkable way."

And what, we may now ask, was the outcome of all his labours in Batavia? There were indeed certain perverse souls from whom the man of God met with nothing but opposition and insult in return for his charity. Others there were who received these words of warning with cynical indifference or positive scorn. There were days, too, when his people forgot themselves and in considerable numbers gave themselves up to scandalous excesses; there were hours of bitter anguish for the missionary, which one day, in spite of all his long-suffering, made him think seriously of suspending divine service for a time in the parish. Finally, there were unhappy sinners who persisted in their bad dispositions to the very end. One day he wrote thus to Father Luyben:

" The old woman—A.W.—who lived here for a time with her daughter, the wife of J.S., has gone back to the town. You may ask me why. Could you guess? I learned the reason from J. and L.—she did not call on me herself before leaving—and it is because I would not let her invite men and women to wakes to spend the whole night singing. So she returned to the town because this gratification was denied her—a gratification which, it appears, is not denied her there. Who would credit this in the case of an old woman?"

With these exceptions, the fruits he reaped were abundant. Through his labours, prayers and sufferings, a great number—indeed it would be more correct to say the greater number—of the lepers returned to God, remained faithful in His service, and, we trust, have saved their souls. Gradually they lent a more willing ear to his wise counsels and fatherly admonitions, so much so that his flock did not suffer even by the prolonged absences of their pastor.

Father Verbeek relates how after a fairly long

journey to the Indians and Negroes, Father Donders and he returned one evening about half-past seven, that is to say, " just when the closing exercises of the day were coming to an end "; " for," he adds, " our parishioners had continued to say their prayers morning and night, in spite of our absence." This certainly says a good deal.

His work as a spiritual director, too, was most fruitful. He succeeded in firing many of his penitents with downright valour in the spiritual combat.

A female leper whom a wretched fellow was trying to seduce for money pretended to agree to the bargain. " But," she added, " we must first go to the church and say five *Our Fathers* and *Hail Marys*." After a moment's hesitation, the man consented to accompany her. They found Father Donders in the church, kneeling before the Tabernacle. As soon as the five *Our Fathers* and *Hail Marys* were finished, the woman arose and went over to the priest. " Father," she said, handing him the money, " see what this man has offered me to make me commit sin. Will you please say Mass for it." On hearing these words of the brave woman, the fellow slunk away abashed by the indignant glance of the man of God.

More and more, too, he won the respect and confidence even of such as were none too eager to abide by what he said.

One day, while he was praying before the Tabernacle in an attitude of profound recollection, a pervert who was observing him could not help remarking to one of his intimates: " Ah, there is a man who believes in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist."

The following incident, related by a leper, shows the confidence that was placed in his intercession with God. Six weeks of intense heat had been followed by a prolonged drought. The water failed, and the people had to go far into the woods to look for some. They began to say to one another: " If only Father Donders prayed, we should have water soon enough." Off they went, accordingly, to ask him to intercede with God for them. At first he said: " Pray yourselves."—" But,

Father," they replied, "if you pray with us, God will certainly come to our assistance." This was in the afternoon. Next morning, at daybreak, the sky became overcast, the rain fell in torrents, and there was water in plenty.

There were no souls beyond the reach of his charity, and so he could not be indifferent to those whom heresy kept outside the true fold. We have already heard him express his eager desire to see them abandon their errors. It is true that his great purpose in life was the conversion of bad Catholics; but he did not at all forget the heretics, and he did all his burning zeal could suggest to win them over.

In Batavia he visited them regularly, and, in spite of rebuffs, never wearied of returning. He often spoke on religious topics on such occasions; but they would cut him short saying: "Father, don't annoy us with all that talk of yours; after all, we, too, are serving God." He would just smile, take his leave, and—be back again next day. On seeing him coming, they would remark: "Here comes this old driveller again." But he persisted, and converted many. What is remarkable is that they who had been loudest in their scoffing were the first to admit defeat. A witness declares that "the greater number of the lepers who became converts through his efforts remained good Catholics."

Similar results very often followed from visits he paid when passing through Paramaribo.

"When my husband," said the widow Elizabeth Schmidt, "fell dangerously ill, he was frequently visited by Father Donders, though he was a Protestant, with the result that he was at last persuaded to enter the bosom of the Church."—"My mother, too," said Louisa Mentinck, "was converted from Protestantism by Father Donders. In her last illness she sent for a priest and, in her anxiety that I should be brought up a Catholic, begged him to have me taken into the Sisters' orphanage." The Servant of God himself writes in an account of a journey he made to the Tibiti: "I baptized six Protestants conditionally, and received their profession of faith."—"Many Protestants are coming back to our

holy religion," again he writes with thankfulness. And in his unquenchable thirst for souls, he exclaims: "Ah, God grant in His infinite mercy that a general return take place. Let us pray that there may be One Fold and One Shepherd."

Of course there were those who persisted in their heresy in spite of everything; but all gave open expression to the profound veneration and absolute trust in which they held him.

"Although my mother belonged to the sect of the Moravian Brothers," says Cornelia Pochum-Walle, "she never spoke of him except as the 'holy Father.'" Amarantha Tijdig relates that one day, during the catechetical instruction, a man of note, who was not a Catholic, entered the church, went on his knees before Father Donders and asked his prayers.

In the *Catherina Sophia* plantation there was a doctor named Cabell, who, each time Father Donders came, told him all his joys and sorrows, just as if he were going to confession. "Sometimes," relates the manager, "Cabell was so anxious to have a chat with the Servant of God that he was for ever coming over to find out when the Father was expected back. Amongst the other non-Catholics with whom I held constant intercourse there was not one but regarded him as an extraordinarily kind and holy priest."

William Schoonhen, who knew him for many years, testified as follows: "It was the common opinion, both amongst the white and the coloured people, and amongst the Protestants and Jews, that the Father was a holy man. I have travelled a good deal in Surinam, in every direction and on all the rivers, and never have I heard anything but good said of him. I have had many talks with the Negroes, and one and all used to say: 'Father Donders is a kind father; he is already a saint; he seems incapable of anger.'"

Father Romme spoke similarly, though in a wider sense, when he said that Father Donders "was the object of universal admiration." "I say: 'universal admiration,' for my words apply to the secular priests amongst whom he formerly lived; to the present

members of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer; to the nuns, who hold him in the greatest esteem; and, in general, to all who knew him or had anything to do with him. The planters—and not merely the practical Catholics amongst these, but even the lukewarm ones, and especially the Protestants and Jews—are constantly making the most eager inquiries about him. How often have I not heard them—even the Jews—proclaim his sanctity! 'Yes, surely,' they would say, 'Father Donders is a holy man. If he does not go to heaven, we have a poor chance.'"

We will conclude this chapter by giving the verdict of his two higher Superiors on the Servant of God.

Bishop Schaap, the Vicar Apostolic of Surinam, in his report of the mission of 1882, writes:

"The Very Reverend Father Donders, who has now been living in this colony for forty years without a break, has had charge of the hapless lepers in Batavia for more than a score. The scope for heroic self-sacrifice which such an apostolate affords is obvious: poor human nature simply has not a look-in; and yet nothing can abate the zeal of this holy priest. Though more than seventy-three years of age, every day he visits those whom sickness or infirmity keeps from going to the church. Every two or three months he visits the Catholics who are to be found either on the plantations, or amongst the Indians encamped on the Saramacca, the Coppename, the Wayombo, the Tibiti, the Calebasse, etc. None but a man of God would undertake such journeys so courageously, in a *tentboot*, and at the cost of such privations; nor would any other ever get through such hard work."

Father Oomen, the Provincial of the Dutch Redemptorists, no mean judge of men, who saw Father Donders at work during his last years in Batavia, writes as follows:

"On account of my health—I suffered much from my legs—Bishop Schaap had suggested my recalling to Paramaribo the Fathers in the two most outlying stations

—Batavia and Coronie; but I thought it my duty to decline. I wanted to see the Fathers at work on the very scene of their labours. I was particularly anxious to see the man whom I had so long heard spoken of as a saint and to study him on the very spot on which he had acquired his reputation.

"We left Paramaribo in our *tentboot* on Monday the 11th September, about four o'clock in the afternoon, and reached Batavia next morning about four. Not to disturb the brethren, we made up our minds to remain on board until five. But already the holy man and his companion, Brother John, were awaiting us on the shore. In the deathlike stillness of these regions, the noise of our oars had betrayed us. At last I beheld our saintly Father Donders, whose praises I had so often heard sung in Holland, in Surinam, and in the course of our wanderings here, even by those who did not share our Faith. And I saw that 'it was truly meet and just.'

"He brought us at once to the church to say Holy Mass, and insisted on serving us himself. He then waited until the usual hour before saying his own.

"During our whole stay in Batavia he heaped attentions on us. It was only afterwards I learned that he had given me his own room and had slept on the floor himself in some old corner, on a straw mattress. He was simplicity itself in everything, and you would need a sharp eye to detect anything in the least extraordinary about him. Seemingly he ate and drank like everybody else; he also smoked his pipe. But, as a matter of fact, he fasted three days a week and mortified himself in all sorts of ways, and that so adroitly that nobody noticed anything. One mortification—which would have been a big one for anybody else—was the constant presence of Brother John, who even then was obviously the victim of leprosy and who succumbed to it a few years later. Father Donders, however, never mentioned the matter and behaved towards him just as though he were a healthy man.

"The following Sunday was the fortieth anniversary of his landing in the colony, and of course such an

event could not be allowed to pass unnoticed. However, we had to be content with little. Brother John had asked the people to make festoons of flowers and greens—which were at hand in abundance in the neighbouring forest—with which to decorate the little church from top to bottom. They set to work at once. At the sight of all these preparations, the Father, who had been told nothing, asked what the matter might be. He was informed that all was being done in obedience to higher orders and that he had nothing whatever to to do with it. He understood and just said: 'All for the glory of God.'

"It was a great affair. The hero of it all, who naturally should have sung the Mass, had to go to the harmonium and conduct the choir, as there was nobody able to take his place. Accordingly, I sang the Mass. A sermon was out of the question, as most of the congregation did not understand Dutch, and I had not a word of their dialect. But at the last moment Father Donders told me that the doctor, with his wife and children—all Protestants—meant to come and had had chairs brought to the church for the occasion. I made up my mind at once. After the Gospel, I developed the idea that the salvation of our dear lepers, for whom Jesus Christ did not hesitate to give His blood and His life, was the one and only motive capable of making the hero of the day live forty years in Surinam, without ever once going home.

"When High Mass was over, Father Donders received the congratulations of the doctor and his family, of the superintendent of the settlement, of the schoolmaster and his pupils, to the number of about fifteen—each of whom presented him with a bouquet of flowers—and, lastly, of nearly all the inhabitants of the village, who crowded joyously around him and gave him gifts of chickens, eggs and fruit. During the devotions in the evening, the delighted pastor addressed his flock, expressing his gratitude for all that had been done for him, for the numerous Communions received that morning for his intentions, as well as for the prayers that had been said for him. In conclusion

he said that they could best prove their gratitude by leading lives in conformity with those lessons of their Faith he had unceasingly set before them."

This manifestation of popular gratitude for his forty years' apostolate in Guiana, and for a quarter of a century's devoted service to the lepers, took place in September, 1882. On the occasion, Father Romme gave expression to his good wishes in the following terms: "God grant that this good and holy Father Donders may be spared for many a long year to work for the salvation of his beloved Surinam."

And yet—who would believe it?—five months had not gone by after this demonstration of goodwill when the ingratitude, the perversity and the malice of a few individuals were responsible for the sudden interruption of his work, and for his prolonged absence from the leper settlement. But before we speak of this unpleasant event we must first accompany our hero on his visits to the Indians and the Negroes of the woods, as well as on those he paid to the plantations during his stay in Batavia.

CHAPTER XII

AMONGST THE INDIANS

1868-1886

THE aborigines of Dutch Guiana—more generally known as Surinam—are Indians. Even in our own day they are still to be found, in more or less numerous groups, in the depths of their forests, on the banks of the great rivers, or in the neighbourhood of some watercourse.

A report drawn up by Father Donders on the 9th December, 1869, furnishes remarkable details concerning the ways of these tribes as well as their conversion, which we here give practically in full. He writes:

"The Indians were the first inhabitants of this colony. In bygone ages they were very numerous and were spread over the whole country. They usually seek elevated ground on which to build their dwellings, which are temporary for the most part.

"It is not easy to give their number with anything like precision, as they have been decimated by drunkenness, smallpox and other diseases.

"They are divided into three groups. First, there are the *Arrowakkas*, who are the most civilized and the most apt for the reception of the Gospel; these are partially clad and are more industrious than the others. Then there are the *Caribisi* or *Caribs*, a race of a darker colour, fierce, lazy, and much given to drunkenness. These are now the most numerous, but as they exist everywhere in scattered bands, it is extremely difficult to instruct them. Finally, there are the *Warros*, who are few in number.

"Each of these groups speaks a language of its own. However, as the elderly folk amongst them have,

through long intercourse with the Negroes, grown familiar with the Negro dialect, we are enabled to communicate with them without much difficulty, except in the case of the women and children.

"The Indian lives on fishing and hunting; consequently he never lays aside his bow and arrows or his hammock and his gun. In the dry season, the men clear the land of trees and burn it off. This done, the womenfolk plant the cassava. They also do the cooking. The Indians live in camps, dwelling in huts open to every wind that blows.

"We read in the history of Surinam that in the last century the Moravian Brothers tried to convert them to Christianity, but had to give up their task. Along the banks of the Maroni, on the borders of French Guiana, Catholic priests baptized a great number of them, especially children. Bishop Grooff also baptized many of them; but for want of regular instruction, there was nothing left of all this."

Father Donders had scarcely set foot on the Guiana coast when he yearned to go in quest of those poor abandoned souls.

"Oh, how much there is to be done here!" he wrote in September, 1844. "How many plantations there are that we cannot get at for want of priests! To say nothing of the thousands of Indians still seated in darkness and in the shadow of death who, down to our own day, have never had the happiness of seeing a priest who would show them the way to heaven. And yet, how they long for one! They have already appealed for one many times. But what can we do? Alas! I have great pity for them. So far, I have been able to help them only by my poor prayers, by recommending them to the infinite mercy of God."

In a letter on the same subject, written two years later to his friend, Father Van Someren, he makes it clear that this desire was not lying dormant within him. We are even given to see that he is no longer satisfied with fruitless yearnings. Matthew Bernhard, the

AN INDIAN CAMP

A CARIB INDIAN WOMAN

sacristan of the principal church in Paramaribo at the time, often saw the Servant of God resort to all kinds of expedients to draw the Indians to the presbytery and impart a little instruction to them. But twenty years were still to pass before he could give free rein to his zeal on this field. As a matter of fact, it was not until the Redemptorists entered the country, twenty years later, that missionary expeditions were made possible.

We find Father Romme, Father Donders' faithful friend and zealous companion, early at work amongst these Indians, and we have him to thank for an interesting account of these campaigns. We reproduce a few passages, which throw light on the character of the people amongst whom Father Donders was to work so long.

"On the 24th October, 1875," Father Romme writes, "I visited the Indians for the first time. I stayed only two hours amongst them, as I just wanted to make the men's acquaintance and have a look round. Brief as were my talks with them, I got a clearer insight into their character; and as I thought it would be worth my while to work amongst them, I complied with the express wish of his Lordship and returned there early in February. Those I went to see had settled on the banks of the Surinam, about eight hours' journey upstream from Paramaribo, in a camp behind the abandoned Overburg sugar plantation. At seven o'clock on the morning of the 6th February, our *tentboot* reached the mouth of a small river which we had to ascend in a canoe. At the same moment an Indian named Mentessac was coming downstream in his piragua, on a hunting-expedition. As soon as we came in view, he made towards us, and on being told the object of our journey, gave up his hunting for that day for the sake of being our guide and receiving a little instruction. Fifteen minutes' pulling brought us to our destination. We went straight to pay our respects to the chief, who was very friendly. After chatting with us for a few minutes, he led us in person to the other camp, which was much more populous than the

one we left. The two are within seven or eight minutes' walk of each other. As we approached, our ears were almost deafened by the barking of dogs. We squatted on little benches about half a foot high, in a hut belonging, I think, to Lawrence. Some of my audience sat on small logs, one swung in his hammock, while the rest took things as they came and planted themselves on empty jars. It was nearly half-past eight when I began explaining the fundamental truths of religion to them: God, man, his destiny. I could see they had some notion of these things already. I got a great hearing when I spoke of creation. I kept on speaking until eleven in the forenoon. Twelve or thirteen of them had gathered around me: the others had gone out. The women seemed frightened; besides, they had their household duties to attend to. The only child present was a little girl of five, named Elizabeth—Mentessac's daughter, I think; the other children still fought shy of me. At noon I went to the chief's tent, where I took enough dinner to save appearances. In return for a piece of roast buffalo that was not to be despised, I offered my host a few mouthfuls of beer, which he eagerly drank out of a pewter vessel. When the meal was over, I lay down in the chief's smoky hammock and took a nap.

"I returned about three in the afternoon, with the same chief, to the first camp, where I repeated the instruction I gave in the morning, with an additional consideration on the mysteries of the Redemption. My crucifix, which never left my hand, was surely more eloquent than my words.

"We left at six in the evening, in order to spend the night on the *Toevlucht* plantation. But at seven next morning we were back again in the Indian camp. There we found the chief, with three men, busy thatching a hut with *pina* branches. On seeing us, they left off work and, after a wash, hurried off to let those in the other camp know that the Father had returned. It was in the chief's hut I gave the instruction this time; it was practically a repetition of the morning one, and again I had men only for my congregation. About

eleven, as I felt unwell, I closed the meeting. I told the three Negroes who accompanied me to hang up my hammock in another hut—likewise belonging to the chief, but carefully closed—and there I rested until six in the evening. I regretted this mishap all the more as the women and children were just beginning to get over their timidity. But God's Will be done. I hope to see them soon again.

" Intercourse with white people has already had a little civilizing effect on them; thus, for instance, so far I have been unable to discover any trace of idolatry amongst them. On my asking the chief what he does in time of illness—whether he prayed on such occasions, he replied that he did. ' But,' I went on, ' what do you ask of God? '—' I say to Him: My God, help me to get better.' Such a reply coming from the lips of this heathen quite touched me. However, it seems that some of their idolatrous customs die hard. Whenever anyone is sick, the *piaïman*, or magician, is sent for. The *watra-mama*, or mermaid, fills them with a superstitious dread. When a death takes place, they drain all the bottles of brandy they can lay hands on and lie dead drunk for three or four days.

" In ordinary circumstances, it appears, there is but little drunkenness amongst them, and so far I have come across no instance of polygamy in this camp. They live by fishing and hunting. They also cultivate the cassava, banana, ochra and other products of the soil; but this is chiefly the women's work.

" Their life is very simple. They are up at daybreak and off to a river or pond to wash. The men, when they do not go fishing or hunting, remain at home and spend their time making little baskets. The women go to the woods to gather in the cassava and the other produce they have sown in the land that has been cleared. When a new tract of land is to be worked, the men first fell the trees and remove the timber, after which, unless I am mistaken, they lend a hand at the tillage; but to the women is allotted the work of hoeing and getting in the harvest. This they transfer to the camp in large baskets, which they carry, as they do

large pitchers, in a rather novel way. A strong strip of plaited liana is passed round the pitcher and the bearer's bust, thus allowing the pitcher—or the basket, as the case may be—to rest against the back. In this manner they sometimes carry very heavy loads. The women, as I have said, look after the house, and their duties are very simple. On iron frying-pans nearly three feet in diameter they prepare a sort of pancake, about an inch thick, of very fine cassava flour. Though badly cooked and, consequently, indigestible, these pancakes are their staple food. Whenever the men bring down a buffalo or any other game, they roast it, after having first cleaned it, though without skinning it. Before eating fish they dry it over the fire. They rarely eat food cooked in water, I believe, and it is surprising to see how well they thrive on such a régime, for men and women alike look robust, muscular and healthy.

"The afternoon is usually taken up with the same occupations as the morning. The men make their little baskets; the women do manual work, a little sewing, or something of that sort; but, while the latter get together in one or other camp, the former keep apart in a hut. At nightfall, shortly after sunset, each one goes home and retires to his hammock.

"Their conversation usually turns on the chase or on fishing. Amongst themselves they use the Arrowakka dialect; but in their intercourse with strangers—even when these are Indians—they fall back on Nigger English, which all, except the children, speak and understand, for an Arrowakka Indian does not understand a Carib Indian, and vice versa. They seem to be of a gentle and peaceable disposition. They chat and laugh quietly amongst themselves. I have never heard an uncharitable word or noticed the slightest appearance of a quarrel, and as I was often close by without being observed, I was able to satisfy myself that peace and goodwill reigned amongst them.

"With regard to justice and honesty, these savages could give points to many civilized people. They will never indulge in any coarseness before those whom they

know to be conscientious, and no matter how tempting the occasion may be, they scrupulously refrain from appropriating even the smallest article. So honest are they that they actually brought me back a number of trifles I had thrown away, which they fancied I had lost. Stealing goods or produce from a neighbour or from another plantation is an unheard of thing. They live in contentment without ambition or avarice. The chief is indeed their head, and as such all treat him with respect, but his superiority is more nominal than real. I am inclined to think that idolatry has entirely disappeared from amongst them and that drunkenness is well on the decline.

"I have seen them many times since. My last visit was in February, 1869. On Friday, the 26th, the feast of the Most Precious Blood, I said Holy Mass amongst them for the first time. It was in the hut belonging to Lerus, which was decorated for the occasion. The singing of the birds in the woods hard by lent a peculiar charm to the ceremony. It is impossible to describe one's feelings on such occasions, surrounded by those poor ignorant natives, in the depths of the forest, in a hut open to all the winds of heaven and exposed to sun and rain.

"After a few days spent in visiting the neighbouring plantations, I returned to the same place, said Mass for the second time on the 3rd March, in the presence of thirty Indians, and baptized six children. There are adults, too, who desire baptism."

We will conclude this account with the following remarks of Bishop Swinkels:

"Neither these people, nor any of the savages, give any further cause for fear now. . . . They are copper-coloured and have a splendid physique; I have seen some whose features wore a look of true nobility, with something *distingué* and intellectual about them."

Such were the people on whom Father Donders was now to lavish his overflowing charity and to whom he was to devote a substantial part of his life. His friend, Father Romme, had scarcely begun his work as a

pioneer when Father Donders was on his heels. Though the hapless population of Batavia was still to claim his best attention, yet the Indians, buried in their virgin forests, which the light of the Gospel had hitherto never pierced, were not lost sight of by him, and were henceforth to exercise an irresistible attraction on his apostolic heart.

"How deplorable it is," he writes towards the close of 1869, "that these natives live deprived of the knowledge and love of God, like brute beasts, though Jesus Christ came down from heaven, became man, and died for them as well as for us. Last year, this thought urged me to suggest to Bishop Swinkels to let me seek out these poor creatures in their camps and instruct them; and his Lordship not only approved of my proposal, but gave it every encouragement."

Better still, his burning zeal received the blessing of obedience. On the 14th January, 1868, the Bishop wrote at the conclusion of his visit to Batavia: "I have urged Father Donders to devote more attention to the Arrowakkas and Caribs than to the plantations." The fact that another Father had been sent to assist him with the lepers made such an apostolate more feasible.

Before setting himself to his task, however, he thought he would add to his chances of success by enlisting in his cause the Indians' well-known love for music. And so this man of sixty learned to play a portable harmonium. He considered it would be a capital means of winning over those simple children of the forest. Needless to say, a virtuoso he never became; but at any rate he had the satisfaction of knowing that his little ruse did not go for nothing on his missionary journeys.

It was, then, in 1868 that he set to work. And colossal work it was, which aimed at nothing short of the conversion of all the Indians scattered over tracts of country watered by five rivers, viz., the Upper Saramacca, the Coppename, the Tibiti, the Wayombo and the Maratakka. Accordingly, from that year on, he had to give two weeks of every month to the task.

His first journey—a sort of reconnaissance—undertaken in May, 1869, was to the camp of the Arrowakkas. Though few in number, the natives had been well prepared by Father Romme, who had baptized nearly all of them.

"They are busy building a new church," Father Donders writes, "which I hope, please God, to bless early next year, under the invocation and protection of our Father St. Alphonsus. Things are going on well there, thank God. But their numbers are too limited. I am in hopes that a great many more will soon settle round the new church."

And yet what toil this modest beginning meant! "During my last journey to the Saramacca," he writes, "I had to walk for four or five hours before I could reach the Arrowakka camp. I baptized three of their children. Indeed I cannot say that the fruits of that visit were very considerable, but I hope that God will have pity on those poor people and put it into their heads to leave that place and draw closer to the river and settle near the church; otherwise, it will be no easy matter to see them regularly. Just fancy! I had to make my way across streams and swamps and get over hundreds of dead and fallen trees. Besides, carrying a Mass-kit is out of the question."

No sooner had he returned from this visit than he was once more in the field, this time reconnoitring the Caribs on the Tibiti and Wayombo.[1] This expedition

[1] "The name 'Carib,' which has been given to this tribe, goes back a long way. However, the Caribs call themselves 'Calina,' which, in their dialect, means 'men.' Now this word, misunderstood by Columbus, was improperly rendered by the word 'caniba,' from which 'cannibal' is derived. This explains, but does not justify, the reputation for cannibalism which has been theirs for centuries, even to our own day.

"Their whole character is opposed to the idea. Strictly speaking, what some maintain may be admitted, viz., that they had the custom of removing the viscera or certain other parts from the body of a fallen foe who was famous for his strength and courage, and of eating them, in the hope of thus sharing in his prowess. This would be quite in keeping with the Carib character.

amongst these wild natives called for still greater patience and self-sacrifice.

"The women," he says, "as well as the men go about armed with a large knife they call *maria*. They are fierce and given to alcohol; they have two and even three wives, and are extremely lazy. Clearly it will be hard to make good Christians of them. But all things are possible with God. Let us pray to Him, and let us pray to the Most Blessed Virgin that these souls, bought at such a great price, may not be lost. At first they were afraid of me and would hide their children on seeing me approach."

To these difficulties were added those that arose from their deeply-rooted paganism. Thus, for instance, an Indian harboured the same prejudices against baptism as of old did Radbod, the brutal king of the Frisians, who withdrew his foot from the baptismal font.

"An Indian," Father Donders relates, "refused to come to church on the pretext that, as his parents and ancestors had died without instruction or baptism, so too would he. However, he yielded at last to our entreaties, and promised to come and see what went on. He was as good as his word, and, when Mass was over, said to his wife: 'Let us get the child baptized.' As soon as my thanksgiving was over, I conferred the sacrament of regeneration on the dear little one."

The most formidable foe the Christian religion had

"They believe, for instance, that if a tiny piece of the burnt rind of a calabash—a very light fruit that floats in water—be mingled with the bait when fishing, it will make the fish that is hooked light and make it float also. The eggs of a certain bird of the toucan family, which has a frequent and prolonged cry, will enable children who eat it to acquire a practical knowledge of the Nigger patois—a foreign language for them. A boy who eats the tip of a bird's wing will feel the bird's wandering disposition awaken within him and will leave his home; for this reason, his mother forbids him to eat it.

"At the same time, if the word 'cannibal' is taken to mean merely 'ferocious,' it may in very truth be applied to the Caribs, even to those of Father Donders' time. Several of the early missionaries who evangelized the Maroni Caribs were murdered."—Rev. W. Ahlbrinck, C.SS.R.

to encounter was the sorcerer or healer, the *puyei* of the Indians, the *piaïman* of the Negroes and the white people—that sinister personage crossing the missionary's path at every step and consenting to embrace the truth only as a last alternative. The influence the *puyei* exercises over the men in his tribe is unbounded. And no wonder; for he promises to ward off every calamity and cure every disease, and as his fees are pretty stiff, his unbridled greed makes him the relentless foe of Christianity. As soon as religion shows him up, his easy money-making comes automatically to an end.

Here is Father Donders' own account of his opening struggle with these wretched men and of his first victory:

"The *piaïmans*," he writes, "exert all their efforts to prevent children from being baptized, as, according to them, this would mean death for the children. Now it was just the reverse that happened, for, contrary to all expectations, the little sufferers who had received baptism were restored to health. As the Indians in general are much given to superstition, the moment they take ill or find themselves in any danger, they turn to their healers with absolute trust. The hut within which the *piaïman* withdraws to practise his exorcisms is much like a beehive in appearance, except that it is higher and more roomy. There is nothing within but a long shallow calabash run through with a stick and filled with pebbles. This they make use of at night to make a frightful racket. Some of them with whom I conversed in private owned to me that this was simply meant to mystify people and to help to gain a livelihood.

"One day I was given a glimpse at their quackery. An Indian woman, who had been long ill, was swollen all over and could take very little nourishment, and even that with difficulty; at times she took nothing at all, not even water. The healer was exerting himself so much that he was in a bath of perspiration. After applying his lips to the sufferer's arm and sucking it, he puffed smoke over it from a long slender cigar of his own manufacture. At length he sent the smoke high up through his hands, as much as to say, I suppose,

that the evil spirit had been driven out. I asked him if the woman would be better after this treatment, and he replied that he really could not tell, as he was not yet long enough at his profession to be an expert. Turning to the woman, I said to her: 'Would you not like to receive baptism? It will certainly do you more good than all this foolery, which I advise you to give up.' As she consented, I explained the great truths of Faith to her as well as circumstances permitted; and then, having duly excited her to contrition, I conferred the sacrament on her. Finally I put a medal of Our Lady about her and there and then gave her some holy water, recommending her to take a few mouthfuls of it from time to time. Now this poor woman, whom I had given only a few days to live, recovered."

But opposition did not come from man alone. It came unmistakably—especially amongst the Caribs—from the Evil Spirit also, and assumed a strikingly violent character. One day, about the year 1874, Father Romme was preparing to baptize a child of two years. Although ill, the child displayed extraordinary strength, so that the united efforts of two men could scarcely control it. It yelled, kicked, struck out and offered such stout resistance that only with the greatest difficulty did the Father succeed in baptizing it. No sooner, however, had the regenerating waters flowed over its head than the little one grew calm as though by magic, and willingly let the blessed medal be hung about its neck.

It took twelve hours to reach the Carib camp on the Tibiti from Batavia, and ten to reach that on the Wayombo. Besides the Indians in these camps and in those near the Coesewijne and the Coppename, there were others, divided up into three stations, near the Upper Saramacca, over a hundred miles away from the leper settlement.

"I visited one of these camps," Father Donders relates, "but they refused not only to receive baptism but even to listen to the instruction. Besides, it is very hard to get at them. If I could only say Holy Mass

amongst them, in the long run I should win them over, with God's help; but this would mean taking a canoe and then footing it, compass in hand, through boundless forests."

Here, as elsewhere, the Lord was his refuge and his strength, and it was in utter abandonment to His all-powerful goodness that he looked for and found his support. After numerous disappointments and dreadful hardships, and after having given up what was dearest to his priestly heart—the saying of Holy Mass—he raises his thoughts to heaven:

"All things are possible with God," he says with deep conviction. "Since this work was begun through His goodness, I hope from that same goodness that all these poor savages will have the happiness of knowing, loving and serving Him."

Strong in this trust, the Servant of God continued his visits to the Caribs by choice, in spite of—or rather, precisely, because of the meagre fruit he had gathered from them, and because of the greater self-sacrifice they entailed. Here are the results of these expeditions as recorded by himself:

"One hundred and twenty-three Indian children and two old sick people received baptism; seven of these children as well as one old man have since died. These, we may hope, are now in heaven and are praying for the rest. We married six couples. These results are not considerable, it is true; but we may be allowed to rejoice and thank God Who has deigned in His mercy to be mindful of these poor creatures. Besides, we are not accustomed here to conversions *en masse*."

From the outset his firm grasp of realities had shown him that, difficult as it had proved to bring those pagans to the Faith, it would prove more difficult still to keep them steadfast to its teachings. The missionaries were few in number; the assistants yet fewer. And so we catch a note of alarm:

"These children must now be instructed, and these old men baptized, if we do not want to see very little of our work left. The one way to consolidate the good that has been done is to have a school. But how are

we to get these people together, when they are so scattered and the distances between them are so great? The difficulty is all the bigger as they live, for the most part, by hunting and fishing. It would be something if they were all under a single chief, but there are almost as many of these as there are families."

This is clearly a source of worry to him. However, looking at things, as was his wont, from a supernatural standpoint, he concludes his report with these consoling reflections: "God can provide for everything; we are nothing. Therefore let us abandon ourselves to Him. Let us pray much and implore the help of our dear Mother Mary."

Filled with this trust and enriched with the blessings showered on him by God in reward for his life of sacrifice, he saw the work gradually assume substantial proportions. Batavia, it is true, continued to be his usual residence, but henceforth it was to become, in addition, a base from which he would go far afield. His correspondence and other writings allow us to follow him closely in his apostolic wanderings.

We have already heard him, on returning from his first expedition, give expression to his regret that he was unable to say Mass through lack of a Mass-kit. However, as the reader is aware, he soon tided over that difficulty, and we learn from Sister Mary Antonia, a Franciscan nun in Paramaribo, who had it from his own lips, what his feelings were during his first Mass in the midst of the forest. Writing to her sister, Sister M. Bernarda, a Redemptoristine in Velp, Holland, she says:

"Ever since a little native boy had recovered from a mortal illness, after having received baptism from Father Donders, these poor Indians brought their children spontaneously to him to be baptized. He baptized several and promised to do the same for the adults, on the condition that they would consent to receive instruction and live up to their religion. He also promised to return soon and say Mass for them, which he did shortly after. Splendid and colossal was

the temple in which the spotless Lamb was first offered in sacrifice in this country. Giant and venerable forest-trees seemed to pillar the blue vault of the tropics, while the sunlight, streaming through their foliage, broke into countless twinkling stars. Myriad winged musicians, in plumage gay, executed their morning orchestra with more than their wonted sweetness. The Father told us it was impossible to describe his feelings at that solemn moment when, for the first time since the institution of the Eucharist, the Holy Sacrifice was offered in that mighty solitude, in presence of those human beings who, though purchased by the Precious Blood, knew naught of Him Who is their Creator and their Redeemer. And how have *we* merited to know Him and receive the Faith from His bounty? . . .

"Father Donders spent a few days longer amongst them, instructed and baptized as many as he could, and commissioned the most competent amongst them to teach their brethen how to pray during his absence. From that day forward, in spite of the hardships of the journey, he continued visiting his children regularly."

On the 29th May, 1869, he writes to Father Van Someren: "I have succeeded in winning the confidence of most of them. In addition to about eighty children, I baptized a few old men and a few sick people, and married a few couples, whom I admitted to First Communion. As you can see, we cannot rush things; but with God's grace, without which we can do nothing, I hope to succeed in gaining them all for God. Did not Jesus Christ shed His Precious Blood for them as well as for us?"

Some six months later, on the 9th December, 1869, he is glad to see that, amongst the Caribs, the children are beginning to clothe themselves more amply, and the adults, too, in a small way, "evidently as a result of my appeals," he says; "however, I am not making much headway; progress is always slow amongst these people."

"I put a blessed medal of Our Lady on the children

I baptized and on the adults who expressed a wish to receive it—at least whenever I had a supply. I tried to get them to call their knife *nifie*, as the Negroes do, instead of calling it *maria*, and to reserve this word for God's Mother; otherwise, in the *Ave Maria*, which I am teaching them to recite in Nigger English, *Odi, Maria* would mean: *Hail, Knife*.

"Those living on the Tibiti have already promised me to build a chapel, but it is one thing to promise and another to perform with these people.

"Let us have patience, and let us count upon Him Who is so good and Who is all-powerful. All beginnings are difficult, but we must work for God. We tried to draw them into these parts (in Batavia), but without avail. They know the land is too low-lying and often flooded during the rainy season, and hence unfit for cultivation. It is a great pity, as this would be the most effective means of reaching the children, of instructing them and getting them into the practice of their religion. But God will provide."

On the 11th February, 1871, he writes thus to Father Schaap, his Provincial:

"I am very pleased with the Arrowakkas and the Warros; work amongst these is very fruitful. On the Upper Saramacca, in the *Kraayenshoofd* territory, they got some others to help them to build a small church, which was blessed under the invocation and protection of St. Alphonsus, on the feast of St. Rose of Lima. Nearly all these Indians have been baptized, married and admitted to Holy Communion.

"So far, those on the Maratakka have had the benefit of only one visit. On that occasion, thirty-six children and one sick old woman were baptized. Their eagerness to receive religious instruction was extraordinary, and I was much touched and consoled. It took some amongst them but two days to learn the *Our Father* and *Hail Mary*, together with the essential truths. The divine goodness will, I hope, let me see them again soon and make a longer stay. I trust I shall thus have the happiness of baptizing and marry-

ing a great number. They are about one hundred and thirty in all. They are about two hundred and forty miles from Batavia."

Let us gaze for a moment on the picture this brief and modest account of things conceals.

With the blessing of obedience upon him, Father Donders leaves his beloved Batavia for several weeks. Bent in two in his little cabin, he moves along for hours between the silent forest-fringed banks of the river. Above him is the azure of a tropical sky; around him bright-hued birds disport themselves. As his eyes roam over the enchanting scene, his soul soars Godward and he seems to behold the wondrous heavens above him open and show the world's Saviour seated on His throne, and by His side its Queen, exercising her office as Mediatrix of men.

After travelling many days, to the rhythmic sweep of the oars, he perceives a river-mouth narrow and dark, roofed in by interlacing trees. Men and missionary leave the vessel and enter a *coriâl*—or canoe—which glides swiftly over the sombre surface of the stream. About six in the evening, as the shadows lengthen, they go ashore on the muddy bank, to spend the night in a hammock in the shelter of the forest. On the morrow they are off again, and so on for many morrows to come, pushing ever onward, for, as we have said, they have some two hundred and forty miles to go. At last, through an opening in the trees, a broad bright patch appears on the dark background. On an eminence lies the camp of the peaceful Arrowakkas. Father Donders steps ashore, climbs the bank, and with his face bent to earth, gives himself to prayer—to prayer for those souls he has come so far to seek, through all that heat and hardship. Then he rises, approaches the huts, and slowly runs his eyes over those men of the copper skin and the raven hair; while they in turn gaze on him from the doors of their homes, some in amazement, others in awe. Without more ado, he intones a hymn, accompanying himself the while on the little portable organ. Straightway the music works

its spell on those children of nature. One by one the men draw nearer and nearer to the stranger, until at length the entire camp is around him, the women and children at a distance, the men, to the number of thirty or forty, squatting in a circle or perched upon the branches of giant trees.

The hymn is ended and the last notes of the little organ die away. And now the moment has come for the missionary to hold the image of Jesus Crucified before the attentive gaze of his hearers and to unfold to them the great mysteries of which it is the symbol. Never to this day have they heard them set forth in such clear and simple words, though they think they can recognize in his teaching certain distant affinities with their own traditions.

Then, to impress the spoken word more deeply on their minds, he displays before their wondering eyes a great gallery of pictures showing the chief scenes from the Old and New Testaments.

Finally, the solemn moment comes when, in pathetic accents, the apostle of Jesus Christ exhorts, urges, adjures his hearers to be converted to God. An embarrassing silence follows. At length a man emerges from the crowd, comes slowly, very slowly forward and expresses his wish to hear more about these wonderful things from the white man's lips. Others follow suit, though with evident reluctance. Then the instruction begins, that is to say, the tedious repetition during long hours, of prayers and the truths contained in the Creed. All this the missionary repeats and gets repeated to satiety in the morning and the afternoon, with the result that at last the neophytes have a firm grasp of it and are able to impart to others what they have been the first to hear.

But the time has come for him to leave. After distributing medals and little crucifixes and promising to return soon, the Father, followed by repeated cries of *Salapa, salapa*: *Good-bye, good-bye,* starts for home and faces another two hundred and forty miles.

Such were his labours amongst the kindly Arro-

wakkas; he fared differently, in the beginning, at least, amongst the Caribs.

"These are the most numerous," Father Donders writes; "but so far I have nothing good to report, though I hope to have better news later on. I baptized most of their children—almost all, I may say. As for the old people, the women as well as the men are slaves to drink. Many of the men have two, and even three wives. Great patience is needed in dealing with them. All the same, I think we are making headway, and I hope, with the help of God, to have better news for you soon. Let us pray, let us pray, and let us put all our confidence in God's power and mercy."

What sacrifices did it not cost the man of God to obtain this mercy, especially where the Caribs were concerned! What pains accompanied his prayers! What prayers accompanied his pains!

Scarcely had he greeted the inhabitants on his arrival in a camp when he would withdraw into the forest to scourge himself. Many a time the boatmen found this out. Nor did his prayers and vigils escape their notice. Very often, in the night-time, they could see a light on the boat from the shore where they were lying, and on drawing closer, would find him praying by candlelight. As they got used to this, they gave up going to look. In addition to the mortifications he imposed upon himself, in imitation of Jesus Crucified, numerous were the crosses he had to bear, and not seldom from those in whose eternal interests he undertook so much. How often did it not happen that, on appearing before a camp, he found it absolutely deserted! How often did these people obstinately refuse to listen to him, though it was for their sakes alone—to bear them the Divine Message—that he had made a dreary journey of many days! On one occasion the Bishop was present at an interview the missionary was having with one of the chiefs. He was endeavouring to get the man to break off an illicit intimacy. As the conversation waxed heated, the Indian suddenly asked for a drink. The Father replied in a peroration of such

warmth that when he put the final question: "Will you give it up?" it seemed morally certain that an affirmative answer would be forthcoming. Nothing of the sort. There came the laconic reply: "*Ise pa wa*: *certainly not.*" But he never lost heart. "Ah," he wrote to the Father who was taking his place in Batavia, "let us pray much for these poor Indians."

Brother Anthony gives us some idea of this heroic steadfastness. "One day," he says, "I accompanied Father Donders on a visit to the Caribs living on the banks of the Tibiti. We first entered Celebeskreek, half an hour's journey from Batavia. No sooner had we stopped than our little craft was surrounded by Indians clamouring for wine and beer. Father Donders told me to give them beer. I informed him that the supply had been already drawn upon and that we had ten days' travelling before us yet. 'No matter,' he replied; 'keep what you want for yourself; I am going to drink water.'—'Oh,' said I to myself, 'we shall have to mortify ourselves now, we are travelling with a saint.' After a day and a night on the water we reached the Carib camp. Alas! men, women and children were all in a state of intoxication. In spite of the Father's entreaties, not a single one came near the church. At eleven o'clock he began Mass. Not an Indian was to be seen; the congregation consisted of the boatmen and myself. After some time a Negro came in and impudently ran up and lit his pipe at one of the candles on the altar. It was noon before we could get a cup of coffee. I had remained fasting, as I wanted to receive.

"It was as much as the Father could do to muster a handful of children in the afternoon, and a few adults —these latter still half-drunk—in order to teach them their prayers. We then went through the camp, renewing our entreaties, but we were simply losing our time. Thereupon, after having done everything possible, Father Donders decided to leave that same evening and push farther on. 'Father,' I remarked on the way, 'if you ever succeed in getting good out of those people, you'll be a wonderful man.'—'That's true,' he replied,

CHURCH, CONVENT AND SCHOOL OF THE MODERN VILLAGE
OF TAMARIN

'and I'm thinking we shall have to leave them.' He had not the heart to do it, all the same, and he went on visiting them as usual, hoping against hope.

"About ten o'clock we anchored, in order to wait for high water, and, having said our prayers, stretched ourselves out on the seats to get some sleep. We might have been asleep about two hours when suddenly the Servant of God arose, awakened by the rush of water into the vessel. I jumped up quickly. We were already knee-deep in water. It was pitch dark. We called aloud to the men who were sleeping in the boat beside our own. We had to bail out or sink. We worked hard all the night. We were wet to the skin and numbed with cold. All our effects were floating about. Advancing farther was out of the question, and there was nothing for it but to return to Batavia. It was eleven when we got back. After changing our clothes, Father Donders said Mass most devoutly. When at table, he laughingly related our adventures, and things went on as though nothing had happened. Father Donders must certainly be *a man*, to be so master of himself in all circumstances. I at any rate was very glad to be home again."

Serious danger was not at all rare on these expeditions. A journey from Batavia to the Indians on the Saramacca meant going down the Commewijne, to begin with, then spending some hours on the open sea, and, finally, entering the mouth of the Saramacca. Now it was no easy matter, as the sea is often rough at that spot, and more than one has been in great peril there. And yet that was the route usually followed by Father Donders. On one occasion the frail craft had such a bad time of it that the men had to put about and make for shelter with all speed. Next morning the Servant of God expressed his wish to reach the Indians all the same. "But, Father," said the men, "the sea is as bad as ever."—"No matter," he replied, "I must get there. My life is in God's hands."

"On another occasion," his trusty boatman, Anthony Felixdaal, writes, "we were returning from the Way-

ombo by the Coppename. It was nine o'clock at night, and we were in the great bend above Batavia. There was a stiff breeze blowing and the waves looked threatening. Though we were pulling for all we were worth, we were taking in so much water that we thought we should founder. 'Father,' cried the skipper, 'come out, we're sinking.' Emerging from his cabin, the man of God replied: 'Not at all, Joseph, we're not going to be lost. God will protect us.' He thereupon began to pray and to bail out the water with a bowl! Suddenly, raising his hands to heaven, he uttered a few words in a loud voice. I did not understand them, but I suppose they were Latin. At once the sea went down. 'Father,' Joseph then said to him, 'God has heard you; else it was all up with us.'—'God,' replied the Father, 'hears everyone who prays with faith.' He expressly forbade us to say anything about what happened, not coveting the honour that comes from men. To God alone be all honour and glory."

Again, when on his way to visit the Indians, the boat ran aground on the edge of a vast swamp. "Father," said the men, "there is no going farther, and we don't want to risk our lives."—"But," he replied, "are there not human beings on the other side? Were there but a single soul there, I must go." Thereupon, taking off his shoes and stockings and fastening them to the end of a stick, which he slung over his shoulder, he fearlessly crossed the swamp.

One day, after a fairly long journey by water, the men, anxious to get home, tried to convince him that the country farther on was not inhabited. While looking about him undecided, he noticed some banana skins floating on the stream. "Look at these," he exclaimed, "is not that a sign that there are human beings over there?" There was no more room for discussion, and they simply had to go ahead.

He often went so deep into the forest that, overtaken by the darkness, he was obliged to spend the night there lying in his hammock. He once happened to mention this to the Franciscan Sisters in Paramaribo.

"When we asked him," they said, "if he was not afraid of the wild beasts, he replied with a laugh: 'Not at all; they know only too well that I should make but poor fare; I'm too thin and tough.' As we were very anxious to know what he did when the heavy rain came down, we asked him. 'I let it come down' was the answer."

As we can see, travelling by water was not at all unattended by danger. His journeys by land were hardly more so, to say nothing of hardships which called for almost superhuman endurance. Regular roads there were none, except in Paramaribo; all the rest was forest, prairie and swamp. The forest was absolutely trackless; trees and brushwood grew in promiscuous profusion. An inextricable tangle of branches of giant trees—some soaring skyward, others drooping to earth—held up the traveller at every step. Beneath the age-long accumulation of vegetable matter that strewed the ground, not seldom did the sinister hiss of the snake make itself heard; the presence of the tiger, too, lying in wait in some thicket, had to be reckoned with, while monkeys swung by their tails from the overhanging branches. Such were the wild regions through which the man of God roamed in quest of some tribe of Indians that he might evangelize them. Now these expeditions, undertaken, pushed through and repeated under such conditions, were so nerve-racking that his two travelling companions—a Negro and an Indian—though born and reared in the country, at last declared that they had enough of it and that they would accompany him no longer. But, though a priest more than sixty years of age, he never wearied of repeating these journeys. A supernatural force—his devouring zeal for souls so dear to God—drove him relentlessly on. Indeed, so tireless was he in their pursuit, as the men declared, that once he discovered the slightest sign of a trail, nothing could hold him back, and he would follow it up a long way, ever in the hope that it would lead to some inhabited spot.

There is an Indian camp named *Matta*, lying between the Saramacca and the Surinam, which is reached by a

path that skirts the Para. Unaware of this fact, Father Donders one day set off for it, going by the Saramacca. Now the path in this direction winds through swamp, prairie and forest. His chief boatman and an Indian were his companions. It was a dreadful journey. They had to flounder through mud and water, under a burning sky and along wellnigh impassable tracks, with their eyes blinded by the reflection of the sun's rays from the sand.

They reached the camp that evening half dead. After no further repose than that afforded him by a night spent in a wretched hut, Father Donders preached, baptized three children and started for home again.

"It was of this journey," writes Father Govers in his biography, "that he himself said: 'The distance is too great, and walking through forest and swamp, over hundreds of fallen trees, is too painful. Besides, carrying a Mass-kit is out of the question.' But he soon went back on these words and was already planning out a fresh expedition. However, as he was making ready to go alone—his first boatman having refused to accompany him—the Bishop forbade him and sent another Father in his stead by another road.

"Matta is at present one of our most flourishing Indian stations. May we not say that it is the fruit of Father Donders' spirit of self-sacrifice and spirit of prayer?"

Sea and sky and land were not the only sources of danger the Servant of God had to face on his apostolic journeys; he had to reckon with the passions of men whose hostility often broke out into violence and cruelty. One day, as he was preparing to baptize some children, a fierce-looking Indian approached and threatened to kill him. "I am quite ready to die," said the priest calmly, "only first let me baptize these little ones." Fortunately one of his boatmen ran up in time to save him.

On another occasion his skipper went to fetch a

little child whom his mother wished to have baptized. The child's father, who so far had withheld his consent, was lying drunk at the time. On seeing what was about to be done, he flew into a rage. With a bound he rushed at the missionary and struck him violently on the side. The boatman seized the fellow by the throat. "Let him go," said Father Donders, and then laying his hand kindly on the shoulder of the fanatic, he said in a friendly tone: "Let me baptize your little one, my good man." These gentle words at once disarmed the wrathful Indian, and on the same day, with the common consent of the parents, the child received holy baptism.

Nor was he spared gross insult. "Clear out of this. What are you doing here?" an angry Indian would sometimes yell at him. One day he heard words that touched his honour as a priest. "Fie upon you, Christian," he said to the fellow; "but listen to me, you'll burn, you'll burn, I tell you."—"I was present at the scene," says Rudolph Waldon, a wood-cutter whom the Servant of God had baptized and married. "Immediately after," Rudolph goes on, "the Father went and said Mass, and then he left for Donderskreek." It was Thursday. Now that same night, Christian was lying in his hammock when the latter took fire and the man's side was badly burnt.[1] The following Saturday, as the missionary was on his way back to Batavia, Christian caught up on him and begged his blessing and his pardon. His burns took a whole fortnight to heal, and he kept the scar all his life.

What pained him infinitely more than any personal affront were the blasphemies sometimes uttered against God by the pagans. One day, after vainly exerting every effort to convert one of them, he showed him his crucifix, saying: "Look! here is the image of God Who suffered for you."—"Let me look," replied the pagan, and he looked at it for a few moments. "This is evidently some evil-doer," he then said; "if he had not been a bad man, he would never have been nailed to

[1] The Indians are accustomed to make a fire under their hammocks at night.

the cross." The Indian knew not what he said, indeed, but the words pierced the heart of the lover of the Crucified like a sword. Deeply stirred, he gazed long at the sacred image and prayed fervently for the unhappy man who had blasphemed the God he knew not. This time, too, his prayer was heard. On the occasion of his next journey, he had the happiness of witnessing the conversion of this Indian. "At present," Father Govers wrote in 1914, "he is still alive and is a good Christian."

After having surveyed the long series of dangers and hardships attendant on his apostolic journeys, we shall accompany him on these journeys with all the more interest and pleasure.

From the 27th August to the 12th October, 1871, he was again amongst the Arrowakkas on the Maratakka. On the 16th October, he writes to his Provincial:

"Now that I am back in Batavia after my expedition to the Indians, I am going to discharge my duty of writing to you, Very Reverend Father. I left here on the 27th August and returned on the 12th of this month, after a journey of forty-seven days, in the course of which I also visited the Caribs on the Wayombo and the Tibiti. As you are aware, Very Reverend Father, I visited the Maratakka Arrowakkas *only once*, last year, and on that occasion I baptized the majority of their children. My intention was to instruct and baptize the old men too. *Deo gratias et Mariæ!* The results exceeded my expectations, as, thanks be to God, I had the consolation of baptizing, in addition, one old Negro and thirteen children, so that in all I had thirty-nine baptisms. I remained thirteen days at my first station, on the Maratakka, for I baptized in three different places, as it is rare to find them assembled in one spot. They ran up a sort of chapel here within twenty-four hours. As they are most eager for instruction, they were all there—even the children—at half-past six in the morning to hear Holy Mass. They did not take very long to learn the *Our Father*, the Apostles' Creed, etc. While I was saying Mass, which they

heard devoutly—kneeling, for instance, at the Consecration and the Communion, and standing at the Gospel—Joseph recited the Rosary with them. At eight o'clock they went off to work. They returned in the afternoon, between half-past four and five, and remained until seven and even later, in their eagerness to receive instruction. In the interval, that is to say, in the forenoon and afternoon, they sent their children to us, so that most of these, as well as the adults, knew their prayers and the essential truths by heart before night. Thus they know how to pray, and they will pray—which is of supreme importance, *for whoever prays obtains.* I also prepared the old men for baptism and marriage; on one or two evenings before the ceremony, I said the Rosary with them in order to obtain for them from God, through the Blessed Virgin, the grace to repent of their sins and receive holy baptism worthily. Yes, these Indians—good simple folk—are sincere in their faith. There were two men amongst them having each two wives. But after being told that God did not sanction such a thing, and that, if they wanted to be Christians, they would have to choose between the two, they made up their minds on the spot and declared themselves ready to separate from one rather than renounce baptism—a good proof that they loved God more than creatures. Even the *piaïman* abjured his superstitions and received baptism. The parents of the two boys I baptized last year—giving one the name of Peter and the other that of Paul—requested Joseph, my companion, to take these children with him and put them to school in Batavia and train them to teach the others. And so I brought them here. They knew all their prayers already and, in the course of our journey, I saw and heard them teaching them to the other children like regular little apostles. Reverend Father Van Vlokhoven welcomed with open arms the two young recruits I brought back to him."

The Vicar Apostolic, Bishop Swinkels, was keenly interested in Father Donders' missionary activities. Not satisfied with encouraging him in every way and

often coming to his help, he was anxious to see for himself those labours that were being so visibly blessed by God. As he was in Batavia in the November of 1871, he suggested accompanying the Servant of God on a visit to an Indian camp. The prelate has left us an account of this expedition which is rich in detail concerning the sufferings and sacrifices of a missionary's life—matters about which Father Donders kept an almost unbroken silence.

"On my return from Batavia," the Bishop writes, "our crew consisted of two boys of fourteen or fifteen, and two lepers of fifty or sixty years of age. One of these latter had practically no feet left and hobbled aboard by means of a long stick. The pilot was minus three fingers. The cabin of the *tentboot*, in which we were to spend four days and four nights, was so low that I could not sit erect under the hood, even with my hat off, and so short that, when both of us lay down side by side, and lengthways, a third person would have but little room to stretch himself cross-wise at our feet.

"We left Batavia at five in the morning and came to anchor in the Saramacca at eight that night. A touching scene took place here. The sky was spangled with stars; not a leaf stirred; the river lay like a mighty mirror; a deathlike stillness reigned. The men sat motionless in their places, their beads in their hands, their oars lying across their knees, with the blades resting on the water. We were facing them, as we could not do otherwise for want of room. Father Donders began the Rosary and all answered aloud. When the Rosary was over, the pilot gave out the night prayers and I concluded by giving my episcopal blessing. I was deeply moved. The men, wrapping an old blanket round them, lay down to sleep on their benches. We remained as we were a while longer, under that glorious sky, lost in our thoughts. Suddenly the men began striking their faces smartly, while we retreated into our cabin. All in vain. A swarm of mosquitoes had come down upon us. We had to take

the extreme measure of lighting a fire and causing a thick smoke. The eyes were burnt out of our head and we were half suffocated, but our troublesome visitors were driven off. Then each of us tried to be the first off to sleep. I was not the winner. Leaning at one of the little windows—the whole six of them were open—with my head resting on my hand, I forgot the flight of time as I gazed upon the wondrous scene about me, which presented such striking contrasts of gloom and splendour.

"At two in the morning—for we had to follow the tide—we rose, weighed anchor, said a short morning prayer, and then the men fell to their oars with a will. It was eight in the morning when we reached the *Johanna Catharina* plantation. We went ashore for the first time. Father Donders heard the confessions of those I had previously confirmed. After preaching, I baptized two little Negroes. It might have been eleven o'clock when we took a snack, and off we were again.

"In the evening, about eight, we reached a small plantation. A distant voice rang out: 'Is the Father there?'—'Yes, and *Gran Vadri*—Grandfather—too.' Soon numerous voices reached our ears, and by the smoky flare of a torch we could make out a line of figures moving through the underwood and hastening towards the shore. I gave the word to anchor, but I would let nobody come near until we had all said the Rosary together. We had hardly finished when there was a rush for the canoes, and in the twinkling of an eye our visitors were alongside. They had come to greet us and to get my blessing. Amongst them the poor footless fellow recognized his daughter, who had not been a very good girl. I heard him give her wise counsels, and it was most touching. At the end of three-quarters of an hour I dismissed them, and we set about getting a little sleep. Here, at any rate, there were no mosquitoes.

"Next morning, about seven, we reached an Indian camp called *Kraaihoop*. My feelings on seeing them in their native setting are indescribable. The church stood in the foreground, on the shore. It is dedicated

to St. Alphonsus, and can accommodate fifty persons. It consists simply of a thatched roof of palms supported by stakes and sloping down to within six feet of the ground. It is enclosed on three sides by a trellis three feet high. Within there was the communion rail, the altar and the benches. The altar was erected against a partition made of palm-leaves, and behind it was a confessional together with a recess. In this old corner I had to spend the night, though my quarters were better fitted to house snakes and bats than human beings.

" I said Holy Mass early, and the congregation was fairly large. Father Donders followed on and preached during his Mass. During this first forenoon we had the consolation of converting the chief, who had so far resisted all the calls of grace. I could not sufficiently admire Father Donders' patience in instructing. Meanwhile, in company with the lay-brother, I went off to make a hut-to-hut visitation of the Indians, who were as delighted as myself.

" In the first hut I entered, I found a man lying in his hammock, who seemed to be very ill. I felt his pulse and laid my hand on his head, and I found he was in a state of high fever. I gave him a good dose of quinine, which I carried about me.

" All I say about our dinner is that we had fresh fish. Father Donders spent the whole afternoon hearing confessions and teaching Catechism. As these people are wont to retire to rest with their hens, we may pass over the evening. Luckily we had the butt of a candle, and this we lit. At once the Indians came over and leant against the trellis of our *drawing-room* where we had gathered, and which we shared with innumerable hens, dogs, and even a he-goat!

" Next morning, as soon as our Masses were over, I put on my episcopal vestments for the baptism of the chief. He was a tall robust man, full sixty years of age. He gave the responses in a steady voice, though he kept swinging his arms, as he did not know what joining his hands meant. After baptizing him, I confirmed him, married him, and all the others with him, and then assisted at the marriage of a Scotch Presby-

terian with a woman who, half an hour previously, was a pagan. I concluded by preaching with mitre and crozier.

"After dinner we went to visit the tillage, the timber and the trees, which are enormous. A thunderstorm, accompanied by rain, made us beat a hasty retreat.

"We decided on leaving that evening. But I could not resist the longing to pay them all a farewell visit. My patient was still in a state of fever, though it was not so high, and so I gave him another dose of quinine.

"Crowds of strangers had been coming from all sides, the whole morning, in their *coriâls*, and had remained for the day. But, you may ask, how did they know that there was going to be a ceremony in the camp at all? Let me tell you. Whenever Father Donders comes here, he brings a big horn with him. When he is yet many miles from the camp, the pilot blows this, and the 'Father's horn' can be recognized far away in the forest.

"Before leaving we spent another hour singing the 'Holy Family' hymns with them. Father Donders accompanied them on his instrument, and I gave them the benefit of my voice.

"At ten o'clock that night we left these good Indians, who saw us off in a body."

Scarcely a year had passed when further information about Father Donders' visits to the Indians became available. On the 29th October, 1872, the Vicar Apostolic, Bishop Swinkels, wrote as follows to the Provincial, Father Schaap:

"Father Donders has returned to the Maratakka Indians: he left on the 15th September and was back on the 14th October. The Indians of this rather extensive camp belong to the tribe of the Arrowakkas and Warros. They are the best of the lot. This time he baptized sixteen adults and seventeen children, married seven couples and admitted six of them to their First Communion. We heard the confessions of nearly all the rest. About ten or fifteen were absent. All the others are now Catholics, which gives a total of one

hundred and fourteen persons, amongst whom twenty-three are married couples. A great number intend settling nearer Batavia, which means that the Father will be able to visit them frequently. 'Oh,' he often exclaims with delight, 'what good zealous Christians these Arrowakkas make!'"

As we have seen, the nomadic life of the Indians, as well as their splitting up into small tribes, formed an almost insuperable barrier to their conversion. Very often, after a long and toilsome journey, the missionary experienced the bitter disappointment of finding that a certain group of Indians whom he had but lately visited had broken up the camp and had gone far away, often in an unknown direction. Good reasons, indeed, were not wanting at times: either game was becoming scarce in the locality, or the land was no longer sufficiently productive, or again some member of the family had died, and the others fled terror-stricken from the evil spirit, the author of the mischief. This breaking up into small groups limited the congregations proportionately, with the result that, on the occasion of every first visit, Father Donders had to repeat the process of securing a good reception and a favourable hearing. And so he would often say with a sigh: "Ah, if only they had but one chief. But there are almost as many chiefs as there are families."

At last, one fine day, he thought he had hit upon a plan of counteracting the evil, to a certain extent at any rate. Through the kind intervention of Mr. Duyckinck, the Commissioner for the native population of Paramaribo, he obtained information from the civil authorities that the chief of one of the great Indian families and an influential *piaïman*, one Christian by name, should be constituted Supreme Chief of all the tribes settled in the southern districts lying between the Surinam and the Corentyne. The missionary, who knew with whom he had to deal, and knew the value set on titular honours by the Indian, told Brother Francis to have a large gilt-headed staff made.

When the day appointed came, Father Donders,

seated in his boat, left for Christian's camp. He had his arrival heralded from afar by a blast on the horn. The whole population forgathered on the shore. Nor did the *piaïmans* or healers fail to put in an appearance, as they had but lately conspired never to receive baptism and to leave nothing undone to thwart the white Father. The vessel drew in. Solemnly the missionary stepped ashore, holding in one hand a bulky scroll and in the other the staff whose gilded knob glittered in the sunlight. Slowly he advanced towards Christian, who, standing in the midst of his healers, looked on with amazement. Unrolling the document, the visitor read aloud the decree of the Government, bearing date the 1st July, 1870, by virtue of which Christian was nominated *Grand Captain* of the Caribs, and then he handed him the official document together with the insignia of his new dignity. The *Grand Captain*, with beaming countenance, proudly surveyed his dependents, extended his hand to the missionary and grasped it warmly. At once the twofold opposition of greed and superstition was broken down. Henceforth Father Donders might come and go as he liked in the camps, might teach the Christian religion, might baptize and hold every religious function. Moreover, Christian entered his hut, emerged again at once, and without leaving down his scroll and staff for a moment, handed up to the Father what he held dearest in the world—his *piaïagodo* or calabash, which he had been using till then for his exorcisms. There was consternation amongst the other sorcerers, as they saw their prestige shattered at a blow. Nor did the chief stop there, for, though he did not go the length of receiving baptism, he promised at least to have a small church erected in the camp, which Father Donders later on blessed and dedicated to St. Joseph.

Two years later, in October, 1872, Bishop Swinkels wrote as follows to the Provincial:

"Father Donders has been doing well this time amongst the Caribs. This is the worst tribe we have got. We succeeded in having one of their chiefs put at their head by the Governor a few years ago; but his

conduct eventually gave grounds for complaint, and I threatened to remove him from office. During his last journey, Father Donders baptized him. This was no easy matter, as he had to give up one of his two wives for good, as well as his superstitions, which he carried to great lengths, and also to hand over his instrument to the Father. He decided to receive the sacrament all the same, after which he was married. Moreover, the Father baptized nineteen adults and a child. Two hundred and six persons belonging to this fierce tribe are now Christians; and amongst them are four healers, whose instruments, together with the stones used in their manufacture, have been brought here by the Father."

Writing to a confrère in Holland in 1873, Father Donders says of these superstitious objects: "I have a whole heap of them already in the attic."

The conversion of the chief, Christian, who received the name of Augustine in baptism, made him write thus joyfully:

"God be praised! How fortunate I was in being able to baptize their chief, for the devil was certainly in the whole business. The healers—and they were many—had sworn to refuse baptism to the very end, even at death. But on hearing that Christian, their chief, had become a Christian, and that he had actually handed up his *piaïagodo*, they were completely nonplussed. Some amongst them, however, had already taken this step; others soon followed suit. We are thus in hopes that, with God's help, all or nearly all the Indians we have visited will have received baptism by next year. Their number at present is about four hundred."

Alas! Christian Augustine belied the fair hopes he had inspired. After remaining true for a time, his wretched greed again resumed the mastery, and he practised his sorcery worse than ever. This soon gave superstition a new lease of life. Father Donders exhorted, besought, implored: nothing came of it all.

A SCHOOL

Then, seeing his efforts were useless, he took the *Captain's* staff from him and threatened to deprive him of his dignity. All to no purpose.

One day, however, a long time after, the chief was at last brought to a better mind. In the year 1915, when on his way to the Indian camps, Bishop Van Roosmalen reached Donderskreek, the camp in which the *Captain* formerly lived. Christian's wife, a good woman, was still living, and the Bishop, in company with a few of the Fathers, called on her.

"She was a fine old woman of about eighty," Father Govers relates. "Though her hair was still black, her copper-coloured face was deeply wrinkled. She wore, in Carib fashion, a large red veil, which fell from her left shoulder down below her knees, and over this veil another red one of a brighter hue. Speaking softly, like all Indians, she told us how her husband had gone back to idolatry after his conversion. One day, however, as he was indulging anew in his superstitious practices and rattling his *piaïagodo*, Father Donders crossed the river seated in his boat. Taking care not to make the slightest noise, he drew near, stepped ashore, walked straight up to Christian Augustine, and, without more ado, took the calabash out of his hands. This he did without any haste, gently and quietly. Augustine, on his part, offered no resistance, and, after receiving a reprimand, promised to amend. He was just in time. Six weeks later the missionary was back again and found the *Captain* very ill. After getting another promise from him that he would give up his practices and not send for his healers, Father Donders gave him the last sacraments. This time Augustine kept his word; and shortly after, he died. Thus the Servant of God succeeded in bringing back to duty before death the Supreme Chief of all the Indians. Augustine's wife displayed more fidelity to the Faith than did her husband. Never, since the day of her First Communion, did she give up the practice of her religious duties."

In November, 1873, Father Donders had fresh information to give relating to his struggles with the healers.

Not only had they conspired to refuse baptism and instruction for themselves, but they set out to use all their influence to deprive others of these benefits also, and with this in view, spread the report that baptism was the cause of death to the little children. Now, as they had been given the lie in the most striking fashion, they conceived the diabolical idea of initiating all the young men of the tribe in their superstitious quackery.

In the *Cornelis* camp, a certain *piaïman* had isolated three young Indians for the purpose of initiating them in his art. Fortunately, on the seventh or eighth day, Father Donders came upon the scene, just as the hapless boys were literally starving, with nothing but tobacco leaves to eat and tobacco juice to drink. The priest ran off at once to the villainous fellow's hut and set the prisoners free. The *piaïman* uttered cries of rage.

"Is it you, *piaïman,* who have done this?" the Father asked in a steady voice.

"Yes," replied the man.

"Well, I warn you not to do it again. You are the ruin of the young men. Will you promise me to give up this business?" asked the Servant of God.

"I'll do it again as soon as you have your back turned," rejoined the Indian; "we must have *piaïmans* for our cures."

"And why," insisted the Father, "don't you bring your patients to Batavia, where you would get medicine? The Indians of Celebeskreek do it."

"Well, *I* am not going to do it," was the final retort of the wretched man.

Then, gazing sadly on the three youths and casting a piercing glance on their seducer, the man of God said: "It were better for you if you had never been born."

Four days after, on rising at six o'clock in the morning, the sorcerer said to his wife: "I dreamt last night that I should die at nine." His wife laughed at him; John Biervliet, a planter who was present, joined in. But the dream came true. The *piaïman* remained lying in his hammock, and he breathed his last at nine o'clock. Everybody

recognized in this sudden death a chastisement of his implacable hostility to the missionary.

To take such a stand against these magicians called for truly heroic courage on the part of Father Donders. That the reader may have some idea of what it meant, we will here give a brief account of the initiation of a *piaïman*. For this we are indebted to a confrère, Father Ahlbrinck, who is perhaps the best authority on the ways and customs of the Surinam Indians. He writes:

"According to the Caribs, every illness is due to the influence of some evil spirit. Therefore, to rid oneself of the malady, the evil spirit that is its author must be driven out. Whoever aspires to wield this power must possess within himself a good spirit more potent than the bad one. Now this good spirit is found dwelling in certain plants, such, for instance, as the takina, the pepper, and especially the tobacco plant, and it is only by the frequent consumption of tobacco, pepper and takina juice—this last, however, in small quantities—that at length the good and potent spirit dwells within a man, making of him a takina, a pepper, or a tobacco *piaïman*.

"Aspirants for the tobacco *piaïmanship* remain shut up in a hut for a whole week. During the day, they are forbidden to eat or go about; they spend their time sleeping in their hammocks.

"At night their bodies are first daubed all over and then covered with finery. It is thus hoped that the good spirit will be propitious and consent to dwell within them. Then the hour comes for the dances. The aspirants mimic the wild beasts and the birds of the woods, executing successively the dance of the buffalo, the *Kwatta*, the *camaro*, etc.[1] Every hour, tobacco in various forms is given them: fresh leaves, leaves burnt and reduced to powder, or again water in which tobacco leaves have been steeped for a long time. Even during the night they are denied all

[1] *Kwatta* is the name given by the Indians of Surinam to the divinity of the woods. The *camaro* is a species of bird.

other food and drink. And this is continued until morning for eight or nine nights running.

"One fine night the master spirits away his pupils above the clouds, to the home of the great tutelary deity of tobacco. Right above the ground, ropes are stretched, on which the pupils have to dance until they fall exhausted to the earth. Next morning, they believe without the shadow of a doubt that they have climbed the clouds. Personally, I believe that the hapless aspirant, worn out by fasting and stupefied by drugs, is completely in the power of his master, who can put anything he likes into his head.

"This short description—for further details would be irrelevant—makes it abundantly clear what a fanatical exhibition such an initiation must be. Now, this being so, the only explanation I can offer—setting aside, of course, all supernatural intervention—why the Father was not killed, or even ill-treated, when he thus broke in upon the operations of such a demoniac, is that on such occasions the *piaïman* must have been subdued by the moral greatness of the Servant of God. At any rate, no one else would have acted as he did with impunity, and certainly no one else would have dared so to act."

God was pleased to sustain his courage in his struggle with these impostors in other ways also.

Dysentery had broken out amongst the Caribs and had attacked the *piaïmans* particularly, carrying off several. One of the most famous, named Louis, realizing that he was in great danger, received baptism, took the name of Alphonsus and recovered. Two of the three who lived in the immediate neighbourhood of the church were stricken: of these one was converted, the other resisted the call of grace.

"I went to see him on different occasions," Father Donders relates, "and exhorted him to become a Christian, putting before him the frightful lot in store for him if he died in a bad state. Alas! all was in vain; he became hardened and persisted in his obstinacy to the end."

As often happens, the misfortunes of the few turned to the greater good of the general body. These fierce people, recognizing in the missionary a man endowed with power from on high, became tractable and lent a docile ear to the Servant of God; they became more inclined to abandon their superstitious practices.

With regard to the movement towards conversion that manifested itself amongst the Indians about the close of 1873, the following letter, written on the 14th November of the same year by Father Donders himself to his Provincial Father Schaap, will be of interest:

"To comply with Your Reverence's wish, I am going to tell you a few things, especially about the Indians. I will begin with the Arrowakkas, my children of predilection. I went to see them on the Maratakka and the Upper Wayombo last September. No sooner was I in their midst than all—with the exception of a few individuals who were busy bringing in timber from the forest—at once showed their readiness to get instructed and receive the sacraments. What is more, they ceased work during the days I spent amongst them, as they did not want to lose any of my instructions. They attended them with extraordinary alacrity. Accordingly I had the consolation, on the 17th September—the thirty-first anniversary of my apostolate in the colony—of admitting a score of persons to First Communion and giving Holy Communion during Mass to twenty-two more who had been admitted to the Holy Table last year.

"I greatly wish you had been there, Very Reverend Father. You would have admired the reverence and the spirit of faith of these good people. All were decently clad. We decorated the altar a little; we had plenty of greens, but no flowers. They tried to make up for these by feathers—the plumage of parrots, for example. But the communion rail! Fancy, Very Reverend Father, three trunks of trees, two of them doing duty for *prie-dieux* and the third for a communion rail. The first went from the epistle

corner down one side of the chapel; the second lay across the end of the building; the third extended from the end up to the gospel corner. On these they knelt for the Consecration and the Communion. The communion cloth was held by two of my boatmen.

"As soon as the ceremony was over, we left the place, deeply impressed. Three hours' rowing brought us to the spot where the absent ones mentioned above were at work. They had almost finished. I suggested giving them an instruction, as there are many amongst them who are not yet Christians. They agreed, and off they went at once to clean themselves up and dress, after which they returned ready to hear me. This meant from two to three hours' work for me, but it meant also that I had the happiness that day of baptizing seven old men and a child, and of blessing a marriage—all on that same 17th September. Meanwhile, night had come on. At Nickerie, where I went next, I baptized two children and gave Communion to five people. It was seven years since one of them had that consolation, I think.

"On my way back, I went by the Upper Wayombo and gave nine Arrowakkas their First Communion. Thus, in all, I had twenty-nine First Communicants during that journey. Next, I went to see some Caribs on the Upper Wayombo and returned to Batavia after an absence of thirty days. The number of communions amongst the Arrowakkas has now risen to about fifty.

"Would to God the Caribs were like them! These people, seduced by the demon and the *piaïmans*, their quack doctors, entered into a conspiracy, more than two years ago, to prevent the building of the church and even to make things so unpleasant for the missionary that, in despair, he would give up coming any longer. But, notwithstanding all the opposition on the part of the demon and the healers, the church stands to-day, almost entirely the work of the Indians themselves; and, on the 26th October last, by virtue of faculties granted me by his Lordship the Bishop, I blessed it and dedicated it to St. Joseph. The finger of God was certainly in the work; and He visited them with dysentery, especially

the healers. On that occasion, the most notable personage amongst them, realizing that he was dangerously ill, requested and received holy baptism. Thus, in spite of everything, we are going ahead quietly. Yes, I am confident that God will help us to keep advancing. Let us trust in Him and pray a great deal. From October, 1872, to October, 1873, one hundred and five Indians have been baptized, which makes four hundred and thirty-two in all; there have been fifty-five marriages, all told, amongst the Indians."

Thus did this mission pursue its onward way, with alternating failure and success, slowly increasing and consolidating its gains.

Meanwhile, Bishop Schaap had succeeded Bishop Swinkels as Vicar Apostolic.[1] Away in Holland he had been following the activities of Father Donders with the keenest interest, and he now wished to hear from the missionary himself, first, what were his own views of the outlook, and, secondly, what methods he had hitherto adopted for the realization of his aims.

The following correspondence passed between the Bishop and the missionary:

"As it is very hard even for us who are on the spot," wrote the Bishop to the Dutch Provincial, Very Reverend Father Oomen, "—and what must it be for our friends and benefactors in Europe?—to understand clearly the special needs of the Indians living in our districts, I

[1] John Henry Schaap was born in Amsterdam on the 27th September, 1823. He studied medicine at the University of Leyden. During a retreat preached by the Redemptorists, he felt called to the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer and entered the novitiate in 1844. He was professed in 1845 and ordained priest in 1850. He was a distinguished orator and drew even Protestant men of letters around his pulpit. He became Provincial in 1868. In June, 1874, he was made Superior in Paramaribo, where he arrived the following August. When Bishop Swinkels, who had made him his Vicar General, died in September, 1875, Father Schaap became Pro-Vicar of the Guiana mission. After having been consecrated titular Bishop of Hetalonia, on the 10th October, 1880, he returned to Paramaribo on the 6th January, 1881, where he died on the 19th March, 1889.

asked Very Reverend Father Donders, when he was here last August, to reply in writing to the two following questions:

"1°—Are there well-founded hopes for the conversion of the Indians of Surinam?

"I asked this question of set purpose, as more than once I have heard it stated that all those expeditions to the Indians had produced little or no fruit.

"2°—In the event of such hopes existing, what methods are best calculated to bring about their realization?

"I will copy out my confrère's reply, word for word. I will then add a word or two of my own.

"To the first question he replies as follows: 'After having weighed everything before God and asked His light in a matter of such moment, I think I am justified in giving the following answer: Yes, there does exist a well-founded hope, inasmuch as there does not exist the slightest doubt, as far as the Arrowakkas are concerned. For, after all, these people are nearly all baptized and married; we have already fifty communicants amongst them, and nearly all are leading good lives. The Caribs also give me grounds for hoping that they will improve.'

"To the second question he replies: 'By getting them together as much as possible and then having them instructed by good catechists or schoolmasters. It would be their business to inculcate on them the practice of their religious duties, and, in particular, that of prayer. They would likewise teach Catechism and accustom them to sanctify the Sunday, both morning and evening. They would also prepare the children for confession and communion, and do the same for the adults. In the Tibiti district, for instance, where the catechist or schoolmaster has been at work only for the past seven or eight months, I have baptized and shall have still to baptize more children and adults than I had to baptize for the last three years; about thirty children are under instruction there; even old men attend the school, and yet the Caribs on the Tibiti are the worst of all and are as different from the Arrowakkas as chalk

from cheese. The Caribs on the Wayombo also are crying out for a teacher, and, in the hope of getting one, those amongst them who are scattered are now willing to live together. Even men of advanced years and old men are beginning to join up with the rest, and numbers of them are anxious to be instructed. If only instruction could be given in this way, we should have a well-grounded hope of working with much fruit and of one day winning them all for God. The greater number—five hundred, exclusive of a few individuals—are already baptized; about sixty couples are married, and there are fifty communicants, not counting those baptized by Father Romme. With God's help we may one day be able to establish one or two stations. This is what I think, before God, I should write to you on the subject. Moreover, the main point is to pray much for their conversion.

" ' P. Donders, C.SS.R.

" ' Paramaribo,
" ' *16th August*, 1875.'

" And now for my own remarks:

" 1.—According to Fathers Donders and Romme and all those among the laity who have anything to do with them, the Indians lead a nomadic life. They are for ever coming and going, and very little is enough to make them flit from one end of the colony to the other.

" 2.—Whenever a death or two occurs in a particular locality, they get a dislike for the place and are off elsewhere.

" 3.—A great number of them, especially among the Caribs, are much addicted to drink.

" 4.—Generally speaking, they dislike agriculture and all similar occupations. They spend their whole time hunting and fishing, and this explains their wandering habits to a great extent.

" From all this we may conclude as follows:

" 1.—There can be no question of erecting small churches *of any value* for them. The small church built lately has been abandoned by them on account of a death. They must certainly have small churches, but these should be extremely simple and formed of wooden

palisades—in other words, large *pina* huts—and not until some fixity of residence has been assured should anything respectable be thought of.

"2.—Father Donders' experiment amongst the native Tibiti population, which has been so visibly blessed by God, makes our present duties towards the Indians clear enough: we must place *schoolmasters* amongst them, or better still, *catechists*. The building erected by the Indians themselves for a school can also serve as a place of worship. We give the schoolmaster a florin a day, and, taking the true interests of our Indians into consideration, I do not think we could spend our money better. Through these teachers gathering the children about them, the parents will at last be induced to settle permanently in the locality and give up for good their happy-go-lucky life. The difficulty will be to find these competent teachers. However, I have one in my eye."

In speaking thus, Bishop Schaap alluded to one of the greatest obstacles encountered in the evangelization of the pagans, viz., the securing their perseverance in the Faith. It was quite obvious that if their conversion cost dear in sacrifice, as we have seen, their perseverance could be purchased only at the same price. To secure it, religious instruction was all the more essential as they lived in scattered groups and were almost always on the move. Now, seeing their limited staff, there could be no question of a missionary residing permanently in each station. It was exceedingly difficult even to pay them one regular visit, to say nothing of many.

This deficiency Father Donders set himself to make good to the best of his ability. First of all, he earnestly recommended his neophytes to assemble every day, in his absence, for the common recitation of the prayers he had taught them. Next, he took great pains to make them sing hymns, and this with such success that, on hearing of his death, the poor people remarked sadly: "And who will now teach us to sing?"

In conversation and in his reports to Superiors, he kept harping unceasingly on the need of maintaining

uninterruptedly the great work of instruction. We have just heard him on the subject in his report to Bishop Schaap; we have already heard the report he sent to his Provincial on 11th of February, 1871. Speaking of his apostolate amongst the Negroes and Indians, in the plantations and camps, he proceeds:

"Instruction, yes, instruction is necessary, and so is prayer. Parents must be frequently reminded of their duties towards their children. It is much to be desired —for this is of supreme importance—that schoolmasters who are catechists as well be appointed in the plantations. If these were only pious and obliging, they would do us great service. Amongst the Caribs especially, the presence of a catechist, and even our own presence, is necessary if we want to wean them from drink and other things. On the other hand, we are doing all we can to get them together as much as possible under the authority of their *Captain*, Christian; for once this has been attained, we can give them a school and establish a mission-station in their midst."

In January, 1873, we already learn from Bishop Swinkels that, acting on the advice of Father Donders, they were setting their hand to the employment of those great means considered indispensable for the perseverance of the converts. The Bishop writes as follows to the Provincial:

"Our work amongst the Indians is very consoling; another hut is being run up in the neighbourhood of Batavia which will serve as a church. We are training and instructing three of their boys with a view to appointing them as catechists in each of the three camps; they are making steady progress."

Hence, in the year 1875 and the following years, catechists enter on the scene. The farmer, John Francis Tam, for instance, speaks as follows: "I lived fifteen years amongst the Indians on the Coppename, where, for five years, I discharged the duties of teacher. During that time I had the good fortune to see Father Donders each time he paid us a visit." Farmer Gisbert Rups speaks in a like manner: "I was eight years old when

I entered the service of Father Donders, and I remained two years and a half with him; I then went to school in the town, and I met the Father many a time. Later on he appointed me schoolmaster in the *Marius* camp, on the Tibiti, where I stayed two years. I spent six months also, in the same capacity, with the Indians of the Celebeskreek."

Father Donders wrote thus on the subject to Father Oomen in the May of 1875:

"There are a hundred of them in the Tibiti district. With the approbation of the Bishop and the Superior, a schoolmaster—or should I say, a catechist?—has been appointed to instruct both children and adults. It is a beginning which has met with some success. Would we could do as much elsewhere! It is most desirable, and even necessary, if we want to effect some good. But getting them together is the difficulty. God alone can do that. And that is why we must pray. Prayer is the great means here, for what can we do without God's help? Nothing. May I, then, be so bold as to recommend both these poor Indians and myself to Your Reverence's prayers, and to those of all the Reverend Fathers and Brothers, that God in His mercy may have pity on them."

Great indeed were his difficulties in spite of everything, so much so that the catechist on Celebeskreek, who used to come over every Sunday and holy day to hear Mass in Batavia, remarked one day to Father Verbeek: "If only Father Donders had the power of warding off sickness and death, then he would acquire considerable influence over them."

St. Gregory the Great has said: "The true virtue of good works consists in persevering in their performance." Hence we see Father Donders, who was in truth a virtuous man, pursuing the work of the conversion of these tribes with unflagging zeal. Bishop Schaap writes as follows to Mgr. Capri, the Internuncio at The Hague, on the 1st December, 1875:

"Father Donders is the man God is making use of

to bring these poor Indians to Himself. Their conversion is a singularly arduous work, and, for all that, the Father has baptized five hundred of them and blessed sixty marriages. The extraordinary nature of his success can be estimated only by one who has lived in the country and seen its nomadic population at close quarters, and who has become acquainted in detail with the appalling difficulties that confront the missionary before he can reach these children of the forest and keep them together on one spot for any length of time."

In 1876, seven long years had gone by since the Servant of God had undertaken his first expedition amongst the Indians, without his courage faltering for a single day. He was now sixty-seven, his hair was white, and the burden of thirty-seven years of a superhuman apostolate under tropical skies bent him low; and yet he was unchanged except for his virtue, which shone with an ever brighter radiance. We learn something of this from a letter written by Father Verbeek to his Provincial in December of that same year, 1876:

"Here I am back in Batavia with Father Donders since August," he writes. "I made two expeditions with him lately; the first to the Arrowakkas and Caribs on the Wayombo, the second to the Caribs on the Tibiti." He then goes on to describe these expeditions in detail, unconsciously disclosing the heroic constancy of the virtue of the man of God.

We meet with the same spirit of prayer as of old: "After having said Mass in a hut," we read, "and finished our prayers . . ." etc. And again: "We cannot leave until four in the afternoon; it is time to begin Matins"; and again: "In the evening, at six, we leave for the Arrowakka camp. After finishing our meditation and saying the Rosary and night prayers with the men, we made the woods along the river banks ring with our hymns. The Litany of our good Mother Mary and the Negro patois hymns resounding over the waters and through the forest gladden my heart."

We see the same inexhaustible patience in teaching Catechism. We read: "His forbearance in teaching

them prayers is invincible. The '*Wi Tatta*'—*Our Father*—and the '*Odi Maria*'—*Hail Mary*—go on uninterruptedly. Then follow hymns accompanied on the harmonium. I never met his like."

We meet with the same greatness of soul in failure: "No men, and but few women, came to the services," the letter tells us. "In the afternoon, we crossed the river in a boat to invite them; one turned up in answer to our appeal." Once again it was the healers who spoiled everything and fomented opposition. Father Donders did all he could to cure them of their follies, but without success. "Of the Tibiti Caribs, only four persons came to the services—a man and his wife, and two children; the rest, though informed of our arrival, went off to work in the forest. Father Donders has now been visiting these people for eight years, and when a chance of being instructed was offered them, off they went to the woods! As you can see, there is not much to expect in that quarter."

As the letter we are quoting from reveals, the same prejudices and the same contradictions confront him always. In a Carib camp three little children were to be baptized, but when the time for the ceremony came, only two were presented; the mother had secretly taken away the third and refused to have it baptized lest it might die. Fortunately, Joseph, the faithful servant of the missionaries, succeeded in bringing her to a better mind in the afternoon, and she consented to her child being baptized.

Finally, we recognize the same eagerness to help everybody. We read: "There were at least three exercises daily—all went to confession, even the children."

If the year 1876 shows us the Servant of God persevering with marvellous persistency in virtue and zeal, the year that follows shows us that same virtue and zeal raised to heroic heights. In his work for the Indians he had ever to face the same obstacles of drunkenness and immorality; humanly speaking, the future was most unpromising, and yet, in spite of all, he writes:

"God is almighty, and Mary, the Refuge of sinners, is their Mother also. Let us pray; let us have confidence in God and in His holy Mother; let us do penance. The Saints tell us that ever since the death of Christ souls must be purchased with blood—*sanguine emendæ sunt animæ*. If only all men could be brought to know and love God as much as He deserves, through the sacrifice of my life! But may the holy Will of God be done in all things. The holy Will of God and perfect obedience have always and in all things been my consolation, and, I trust, will be my supreme consolation at the hour of my death."

Thus, fearless and unfaltering, this loyal soldier of Christ fought on for the spread of the Kingdom of his King, to that day in October, 1886—three months before his blessed death—when he paid his last visit to his beloved Indians. Of it he wrote: "After a journey of nineteen days, I am back in Batavia, in good health, thanks be to God."

It was his last expedition amongst them, and it was sealed, as were the previous ones, with the threefold seal of prayer, suffering and penance. "He had spent these nineteen days in a canoe," says Father Van Coll. But the same witness also states that "nearly all the Indians who have embraced the Faith in these regions owe it, after God, to Father Donders."

We must add that when engaged in his apostolic labours, God at times rewarded the hardships undergone by His faithful Servant with sensible consolations; though these favours were rather rare—a fact that serves but to set off his heroic courage. Thus, for instance, among the Caribs who refused to go to him was a little boy of six or seven, who answered the call of God loyally. This child made no secret of the fact of his being very much attached to the Fathers. Scarcely had he heard the horn than, jumping into a *coriâl*—which he handled like a grown-up man—he crossed the river all alone, assisted at the Catechism lesson with the greatest attention, and returned home the same way.

The Servant of God one day gave it as his opinion

that in Surinam miracles would be productive of no good; for the natives—so he thought—would be too prone to make him who had been the instrument of them the object of a religious cult. It seems, however, to have been God's Will to gainsay him in this matter; and on many occasions, especially during the closing years of his life, he saw his mission sanctioned by visible manifestations of divine justice and mercy.

One of the sorcerers, who had distinguished himself by his fierce opposition to the Father and had obstinately rejected the grace of baptism, died beside the church without ever having been baptized.

"Another," Anthony Felixdaal relates, "was in the *Savanna* camp when I arrived, in company with the Father. Many times the latter had warned him. 'Give up your idolatrous practices,' he had often said, 'and send away your three wives, and then contract a lawful union with one of them. Mind yourself! You shall die, and all your wealth will profit you nothing.' One day the sorcerer flew into a rage. 'Off with you,' he retorted, 'and don't annoy me any more.' Whereupon Father Donders replied: 'Take care, you shall find your death whilst you are at your diabolical practices.' As soon as devotions were over, we went on to Connibou. On the same day, as someone had fallen ill in the camp, the *piaïman* had him carried into his hut in order to drive the evil spirit out of him by means of his quackery. Now that very night, in the midst of his sorcery, the healer died in his hut. The Indians told us all about it on our return."

His prayers, too, were heard in wonderful ways, a fact that raised to the very highest the opinion the Indians had formed of his holiness and power with God.

"One day," the same boatman relates, "I had brought the Father to the Maratakka and thence to Nickerie. It was in August, and the drought was very prolonged. The sea had receded as far as the Maratakka, and the people were obliged to fetch fresh water from the Upper Maratakka, which meant a week's journey each time. Towards evening the Father arrived. Next morning, as he was preparing to say

Mass, the Indians came up and gave vent to their grief at the disastrous drought. 'But what can I do?' he said, 'it is God Who has willed it. Let us pray.' And, when Mass was over, all joined him in prayer. 'And now,' he said to them, 'get everything you can ready to draw off the water, for God has heard us and is going to send us rain.' As a matter of fact, scarcely had the people returned to their huts when the rain came down in torrents and continued falling from eleven in the forenoon until seven in the evening. All agreed that it was through the Father's prayers that the rain had come.

"On another occasion," Felixdaal goes on, "I was travelling with him on a visit to the Indians on the Maratakka. When we reached *Surily* camp, about fifty-four miles off, we saw Surily himself approach. 'You've got nothing by coming here, Father,' he said. 'There is no means of reaching the Indians, as the river is not navigable.' Now the Indian camp was about eighteen miles up. 'It does not matter,' the Father replied, 'I must see them at all costs. I am going to ask God to give us water.' Next day, after Mass, the river began to rise. On seeing this, the Father gave orders to start. Now, right up to the camp, the water was so deep that only once did our oars touch bottom. On seeing us approach, the Indians asked in amazement: 'But, Father, how did you manage to get up so far? How did the river rise so high? It has been dry the past three months.'

"During the three days the Father stayed in the camp, the river remained at the same level, allowing us to start on our return journey. We had scarcely left when a messenger was sent after us to inform us that the river was again dried up. All in the camp were at one in declaring that it was through the prayers of 'the European' that God made the waters of the river rise."

No wonder, then, that the Indians loved him and spoke of him as their "kind" and "holy Father."

"Sometimes," relates the nun already mentioned, "the Father used to come to town in company with his

Indians, and, to please us, would pay us a visit with his little band and their chief. 'His Excellency' carried the staff with which the Governor had presented him. Now it was a strange sight to see this insignificant-looking little old man surrounded by his troop of stalwarts, who followed him around like children."

Consequently, grief was general when the news of his death reached them, and, in accordance with their custom, they mourned him for forty-eight hours.

On the appointed day everything was ready for the ceremony. The whole camp had been cleared for the funeral dance. Moreover, as it was traditional to hold the solemnity by night, boards had been smeared with resin, and torches made from rags had been saturated with beeswax. Light could thus be had at a moment's notice. At nightfall, men and women gathered in the enclosure of the camp. Two or three women carried the *carawisi*, a kind of rattle consisting of a little shallow basket fixed at the bottom to a stick. The torches were lighted and the dance began, accompanied by a dirge. In this, improvised by one of the three women with the *carawisi*, were sung the qualities and virtues of the deceased, and in particular his charity towards his neighbour; the whole was sung in short sentences, the last words of which, taken up by the entire assembly, concluded with this syllable, well drawn out: *He . . . e . . . e. . . .*

The dancers spent the whole night going round the camp to the sound of this monotonous chant and headed by the three women. The women, strictly speaking, did not take part in the dance. At stated times they struck the ground with their *carawisis* reversed; moreover, with measured tread, they regulated the circular march of the men, while the latter, at a signal given at intervals by the women, suddenly wheeled about and continued the dance in the opposite direction.

Thus did these good Indians commemorate their great benefactor after his death, and it is probable that the ceremony was repeated a week later, when these words were sung: "May you be well. Go in peace. Dwell with God. Prepare the way for me." Now this

is clearly a proof that Father Donders was reckoned by them amongst their own, and even as one of their chiefs.

The following incident, for which I am indebted to Father Ahlbrinck, shows how deeply the memory of their great benefactor is engraven in the hearts of these natives, even to this day.

"I intended," he says, "going on foot from Bigi Poika to Gosteri, which means about a four hours' journey through forest and prairie, and, occasionally, through unfathomed swamps. The Poika Indians, on hearing that I was thinking of returning home the same day, said: 'Father, 'tis impossible.' One woman even got angry because I did not heed her advice and meant to have my own way. On reaching Gosteri, I did not breathe a word either of my expedition or of my hardships. But Captain Alphonsus—he is since dead—spoke to me first about it, and took occasion to recall Father Donders, though no one had pronounced his name. '*Father Donders*,' he said, '*was the first to go in search of the Indians. He sought them out, he followed after them. He was sometimes sunk breast-deep when going through the swamps. Father Donders loved the Indians.*'"

Father Govers wrote likewise about one of his journeys: "We met several Indians at the Celebeskreek who were baptized by Father Donders and who knew him. We also met a Tibiti Indian there who was one of the first adults to receive baptism at his hands, and who boasted that he was the first the Servant of God baptized. All spoke in praise of his kindness and charity."

CHAPTER XIII

IN QUEST OF THE NEGROES

1869-1886

When travelling in Surinam in 1896, our attention was particularly attracted by the pretty little town of Albina. It lies to the extreme east of the colony and is watered by the Maroni—that lordly river a mile and a half wide—which marks the frontier between French and Dutch Guiana. Behind the little city the ground rises sharply and shows nothing but virgin forest. However, it was not so much its picturesqueness that appealed to us as a particular circumstance connecting it with the Servant of God whose story we are telling. In the impenetrable forests just mentioned, as well as on the islands with which the Maroni is studded, are numerous villages inhabited by Negroes who were ever in the thoughts and affections of the man of God. For long years the conversion of these tribes was—together with that of the Indians—the dearest object of his ambition. But results never came up to his expectations, and neither the ardour of his longings nor the invincible constancy of his efforts brought him the consolation of seeing his wishes fulfilled.

It was their appalling godlessness and the utter abandonment in which they lay that exercised on his apostolic heart an extraordinary and irresistible attraction. The Negroes are not natives of Surinam, like the Indians. Descendants of those African blacks who had been transported as slaves into the new continent, they fled one fine day from the tyranny of their heartless masters,

A NEGRO AND NEGRESS

and went off in groups to lead a free though wild and nomadic life in the forests of Guiana. Naturally fierce and vengeful, they engage only too often in bloody feuds. Though extremely particular in all that concerns personal cleanliness and neatness, they are most immoral and are entirely given over to polygamy. They pay divine worship to trees and snakes and practice gross superstition, in which fetishism holds a prominent place. On a small plateau in Albina, there could still be seen, when we were there, a tall pole driven into the ground, at the foot of which the Negroes formerly offered up eggs and made libations. One afternoon we were afforded the spectacle of a dance executed by one of these pagans in honour of some evil spirit. The poor fellow worked so hard and so long at it and indulged in such frenzied antics and contortions, that his whole body, which was black as ebony, was streaming with perspiration.

It was all more than enough to go to the heart of an apostle like Father Donders. Many a time, when ascending the rivers in his *tentboot*, he fell in with these lithe and sinewy fellows in their slender canoes. "I hope," he wrote in 1846, "that in a short time—as it has long been my desire—I shall have the satisfaction of working amongst these tribes. God grant we may make the torch of the Faith shine in the midst of these unhappy people still seated in darkness and in the shadow of death."

Alas! a whole score of years had yet to pass before his desires could even begin to be realized. For how could priests, who were then so few and barely able to keep things going and make good their gains, find time to undertake fresh conquests?

As far as we can make out, it was not until 1869 that Father Donders succeeded in reaching these tribes. That year the two Negro camps of the Saramaccans and the Aucanians were visited by him.

"Auca," he writes, "is situated on the Maroni, in the neighbourhood of Cayenne. The Negro camp lies far from the river, in the interior. It is not easy to

state their number with accuracy : they might be between five and six thousand. All are living in the most abominable idolatry, and, at one time, would not hear religion spoken of."

This time the blacks gave the missionary a kind reception. In reality, they were anxious to hear what the white man had come to talk about. He noticed, when he was being conducted to the camp, branches of trees hanging over the entrance, and he understood that their purpose was to bar the way to evil spirits. He was shown the *obia*, or idol's house, at the very moment when the *obiaman*—the *piaïman* of the Indians—was devoting himself to his superstitious practices.

At the sight of all these objects of an idolatrous cult, Father Donders was overcome by violent anger, and, before he even thought of controlling himself, took a firm grasp of one of these abominations and crushed it on the ground. The infuriated savages, uttering horrible cries and fully prepared to make things unpleasant for the man of God, rushed upon him. But he had already recovered himself; a few kind words broke their wrath and the dauntless apostle withdrew unmolested.

But he had been taught a lesson. Not that this savage outbreak in the least intimidated him—it only made him the more determined—but he made up his mind to keep a check upon his feelings. One day, when travelling with Father Verbeek, he noticed at the entrance to the camp, a pole stuck in the ground with a bottle on the top of it. Not far off, behind the hut, his eyes fell on a small table with blades of grass on the four edges of it arranged in imitation of a cover, which an old woman of the neighbourhood was making use of to practise her witchcraft, to appease her idols and to cure the sick. Father Donders passed on, contenting himself on this occasion with deploring such gross ignorance and praying for these unhappy creatures.

He brought back more consolation and more hope from an expedition amongst the Negroes of the Upper Saramacca.

"We were able to do something with these Saramaccans," he wrote in the December of 1869; "but they are very hard to get at. It means a fortnight's travelling; and even then, on account of the numerous rapids, they can be reached only in canoes and with the help of willing Indians. These people are very well disposed and are anxious to become Christians, but they would like to have a Father residing amongst them. There are about seven hundred men living there together. Hence we should need many more Fathers, and strong ones at that. May God will that this be, and then it shall one day be."

In 1870 he made the same journey as that of the previous year, and with some success. On the 11th February, 1871, he drew up the following report:

"I think that God in His mercy is beginning to enlighten the souls of a certain number of these unfortunate people. Those on the Upper Saramacca who have received baptism, as well as the two who were admitted to their First Communion, are so well behaved that I had to congratulate them all without exception. One of their chiefs, who is still a pagan, is speaking of bringing me to Auca, his native district. One couple, who are already Christian and married and have made their First Communion, want to accompany me there and even to settle in the place, on the condition that we remain for good. Two Negro children of Auca had already received baptism at my hands, and one of them has received Communion. At the present moment they are with their families in Auca, and will, I hope, become the apostles of their little comrades. May God have pity on all these poor wretches and give them His light. Fiat. The month of August will be the best time to visit them."

The same tenacity of purpose he displayed as a young man in the pursuit of his noble aims he now showed, stronger and more admirable than ever, in his multiplied and untiring efforts to win these poor blacks for Jesus Christ. He let no occasion slip of reminding

Superiors by letters and private interviews of the cause so dear to his heart. Regardless of the inroads these distant journeys made upon his slender purse, of the scant fruit he gathered from them and of the sufferings he knew were in store for him, he was never done harping on the desires that consumed him of seeing his neophytes every year.

According to Bishop Schaap, his whole annual income—fifteen hundred florins—went to pay his boatmen. Moreover, he ran the gravest risks on those rivers, whose wide waters were often so stormy. During one of his journeys, as he was approaching the *Kent* plantation, his canoe was so badly knocked about that it capsized. Fortunately, there were some workmen on the scene. These jumped boldly in and rescued the missionary. "Never mind," the latter quietly remarked, as though nothing had happened, "it will dry"; and without more ado he resumed his journey to the Negro camp.

On reaching his destination he had to cope with fresh and ever-increasing difficulties. The Negro intellect, especially in the case of an adult, is extremely slow to grasp the spiritual truths of our holy Faith, and this fact was his constant stumbling-block. One day Father Donders was saying Mass in a wood, with a lay-brother and two Negroes for his congregation. When he turned round to say: *Dominus vobiscum*, one of the blacks, thinking the priest was saying good day to him, replied aloud: "*Odi, Pater*: *Good day, Father.*" The lay-brother and the other Negro made a sign to him to be silent; but the latter, as dull as his companion, went up to the altar, lit his pipe at one of the candles, and sent the first puff into the face of the celebrant.

Though their ignorance of religious matters was profound, it did not constitute a danger. It was quite otherwise with their anger, which at times was truly formidable.

One day the holy man had withdrawn into a lonely place to give himself to prayer, when suddenly a fugitive Negro, who had been long on the run, rushed at him and seized him by the throat, exclaiming: "I am

going to kill you."—"Wait a moment," quietly replied the Father, "and let me pray a little longer." Meekness such as this completely disarmed the fanatic. He let go his hold, and Father Donders was free to return to his boatmen. "I myself saw," a witness declares, "the marks on the Father's neck of the injuries inflicted by that infuriated fellow."

All this, however, was quite powerless to damp the ardour of his zeal. In October, 1871, he wrote as follows to his Provincial:

"According to agreement, I contemplated visiting the Auca Negroes this year, in the dry season, to try and convert them to our holy Faith; but circumstances and the will of my Superiors are against it, or rather, God does not wish me to go just now." He had therefore to put off his expedition to the following year, or, as he said, "until it should please God to make known His Will."

Towards the close of 1872 he wrote rather sadly: "When, then, are the Negroes going to get the grace from God? Soon, I hope. We did indeed meet with individuals whom we were able to baptize and marry; but they are really too few. Most of them are sunk in idolatry. However, let us hope that God will have pity on them, as well as on the hundreds of millions who do not yet know Him."

Four years later, in 1876, we hear the same lament. "Would that the Negroes, through the divine mercy, might one day taste the same happiness (that of embracing the true Faith)!" But he does not stop at idle lamentation; he continues visiting these obstinate creatures; he prays for them; he enlists the sympathetic interest of loving souls in their behalf, and it was perhaps as a result of one such interview that the following communication was sent in April, 1884, to Sister Mary Bernard, a Redemptoristine nun in the monastery of Velp, in Holland, by her own sister, a Franciscan nun in Paramaribo:

"The Negroes of the woods are very fierce; they still offer human sacrifices. Great precautions are

taken when entering their territory. Reverend Father Donders, whose love for God lifts him above the fear of death and hell, has paid them a few visits, but he entertains no great hopes of them. They would have consented to receive baptism indeed, but on the condition, if you please, that they received into the bargain as nice a cap as he wears himself! For the present, all we can do is to pray for these poor creatures."

Towards the end of his stay in Batavia, a glimmer of light pierced the gloom. He wrote to Bishop Schaap on the 14th October, 1882: "The Tibiti Negroes, thirty in number, have asked me to hold religious services amongst them and to build a small chapel for the purpose."

But nothing of any account came of these fresh plans. For a moment indeed—at the close of his career—it looked as though the work was about to get under way. One day a party of Negroes landed in Batavia and proceeded to the church. It consisted of a chief, two women—each carrying two children in her arms—and a few dependents. The chief had come to ask for baptism for the children. Father Donders was absent at the time. The chief told the Father who was taking his place how the party had come down from the Upper Saramacca, where a powerful and ambitious chief had lately hanged members of the tribe. As a result, they had left that territory and had come to settle on the shores of the Coppename, a day's journey by boat from Batavia. As soon as the Servant of God was informed of all this, he was on the spot at once. But a fresh and bitter disappointment awaited him.

In June, 1886, full six months before his death, he wrote that a party of Negroes had settled on the shores of the Coppename. "The others will follow on," he proceeded, "so that their number will grow from eighty to three hundred and will go on growing. Some few amongst them have already been baptized by the Moravian Brothers, but the latter are prevented

A CATHOLIC NEGRO VILLAGE

by the great distance from continuing their visits and instructions. I cannot say any more on the subject just now, as I was there only a couple of times."

Finally, in December of that same year, that is to say, four weeks before his blessed death, he gives vent to his long and fruitless yearnings.

"We are not getting on at all as we should like with the Negroes; but let us have patience and trust in God. He is almighty and rich in mercy. I recommend myself and them to your prayers. Adversity, too, is from the hand of God, and there is no good done without the cross."

It was his last will and testament in favour of the poor blacks, as well as a plan of action for those who would continue the good work after him.

Perhaps it was through the intercession of the man of God in heaven that the hour of mercy was hastened in favour of these hapless pagan souls. No one can tell. One thing is certain: conversions amongst them have made unprecedented strides these latter years, and the name of Father Donders is held in benediction.

"We spoke," writes Father Govers, "with the Negro Piquine-Ba, who lives on the Tibiti, in the camp that Father Donders visited regularly when on his way back from the Indians of the prairie that bears the same name. Although a native of Auca, in the Maroni region, he had settled on the Tibiti from that time. He spoke of the scanty harvest the Father reaped from these labours. He had himself persistently refused to receive baptism from the Servant of God and consented only long afterwards, under Father Bazelmans. However, according to Piquine-Ba, Father Donders baptized several children in his family. The Negroes held the holy missionary in great veneration, begged his prayers for their harvests in times of drought, and attributed miraculous powers to him."

CHAPTER XIV

THE PLANTATIONS AGAIN

1868-1886

With all his lavish charity towards the Indians and Negroes, Father Donders had still enough to bestow on yet another class of unfortunates, viz., those blacks whom a harsh fate kept chained to the soil on numerous plantations throughout the country. As they were the first, together with the lepers, to profit by his zeal, there was no reason why they should cease to be its object now, all the more so as it had happily come about that, owing to radical changes wrought in their moral and religious status, they were at last in a position to avail themselves of his best efforts.

In a letter bearing date the 11th February, 1871, Father Donders communicated these changes to his Provincial as follows:

"1.—Formerly, that is to say in the old slave days, the Negroes depended on their masters for everything and in everything, even in things spiritual. They were given no choice in the matter of religion, and, in most cases, they had even to conduct themselves in accordance with the whims of their owners, under threat of formidable chastisements.

"2.—In those days there were numerous owners and managers who showed them but scant sympathy, and who, with the connivance of the Government, preferred to see their spiritual interests committed to the hands of the Moravian Brothers.

" This has now all been changed.

" 1.—The slaves are free, even where religion is concerned.

" 2.—Most of the owners, managers and other functionaries are very sympathetic towards us and are anxious to see Catholic churches rising on their lands.

" If, then, we do our part, God will do the rest. Such is my deep conviction. I have the fullest trust in God, Who wishes that no one perish but that all men be saved."

He then fixes the sphere of his activities. " On the Saramacca, I have all the plantations to visit, viz., *Kent, Caledonia, Concordia, Morgenster, Johanna Catharina, Margaret's Gift, Onverwacht, Vier Hendrikken, La Ressource and the Grond Kraienshoop.*"

This was in December, 1869. However, the plantations that lay along the banks of the other rivers were likewise to have the benefit of his visits.

Remarkable details concerning these expeditions have been given us, not only by his confrères, but also by his boatmen, to whom he was ever a father, kind, thoughtful, and generous. Everything he was free to dispose of—provisions, travelling expenses, repose—he eagerly gave to them, even at his own cost. But their spiritual good far outweighed all other considerations with him, and what he applied himself above all else to instil into them was a great love for prayer. These men, who usually ask for nothing better than to kill the time chatting, gaping about them and indulging in a ceaseless growl, he trained to solid habits of daily prayer, as we learn from a well-informed witness.

" They knew entirely by heart the night prayers Father Donders had taught them," writes Father Govers. " These were full of acts of love for God and lasted about half an hour. Now when it happened that another missionary succeeded Father Donders in this apostolate of the plantations, the men remained faithful to this practice of the Christian life, and this even without being reminded of it."

He showed the same unbounded solicitude for these poor toilers that he did of old, as we may see by the following incident related by Brother Anthony.

"Bishop Swinkels," he says, "decided to make the round of the Saramacca plantations in order to give confirmation, and Father Donders was to accompany him and prepare the faithful for the sacrament. Now it so happened that the number of the candidates was far in advance of what had been anticipated, with the result that the Father's task was altogether beyond his strength. But this made no difference. With complete self-forgetfulness he went on toiling to a very late hour, and the only answer the Bishop got to his reiterated appeals to him to take something to eat was: 'I shall have plenty of time for that by and by.' When he had finished, he was completely exhausted and had certainly earned a good sleep. But this he had to do without. That same night they were off again, as there was confirmation next day in another district."

His dauntless courage was as admirable as his love for work. Lawrence Doel, one of the boatmen, who knew him ever since his arrival in Batavia and served him on his boat for four years, related the following personal reminiscence when he was almost an octogenarian himself.

"I remember," he says, "accompanying Father Donders one day to the *Boedinghaus* plantation. There was a tree there that was the object of an idolatrous cult on the part of the Negroes, and the colonists had already appealed to the Moravian preacher to have it removed. But the prudent pastor made answer: 'I will take good care to do no such thing; I should soon get the worst of it from these people.' Now Father Donders no sooner heard of it than, getting his boatmen together, he seized an axe himself and began hacking away at the tree for all he was worth. After him, the men went on with the work, but, as the giant seemed loth to come down, the Father, once more brandishing his axe, laid it low."

The very heretics themselves could not but admire such consistent self-sacrifice and scorn of danger. A

nun in Paramaribo, writing to her sister in Europe on the subject, says: "The Protestant managers of the plantations on whom Father Donders called declare that they cannot make out how a man of his years can keep on working as he does. 'If *he* is not a saint,' they are wont to remark, 'then there is none on earth.' It affords them real pleasure to welcome him to their homes. The fact is that he is a very delightful man to meet, most edifying in conversation and quite oblivious of his personal interests."

At times his zeal met with lively opposition, but it was clear, especially at the close of his life, that God was not sparing in the help and protection He afforded His servant.

"One day," says one of his boatmen, "I was travelling with Father Donders to a certain plantation on the Tibiti. On his arrival, the Father asked leave to say Holy Mass. Now just at the time, a gang of eighty-four Indians and forty Negroes were busily loading a boat with timber, and the planter availed himself of this to give a curt refusal. 'They must make all speed,' he said, 'to get the boat away.'

"'Very good,' replied the Father, 'but what would you do suppose they all got the fever? In that case, you would lose your time, and your work would be interrupted.'

"'It does not matter,' was the retort, and the Mass was not said.

"Now as we were passing that way, shortly after, on our return journey, they signalled to us from the shore to draw in. All the workmen were down with fever and disabled to a man.

"'Father,' said the planter, 'things have turned out just as you said. Do not leave this time without saying Mass.' And he begged him always to do the same whenever he should happen to be passing. The man, however, did not persevere in his good dispositions; he became worse than ever. His story is a sad one.

"At that time there was living at *Donderskreek* an Indian couple—Charles and Ann—whom the Servant of God had married. For years back they had been living

in perfect harmony and contentment, when one evil day the planter carried off the wife to his own house. In great distress, the poor Indian hurried off to Batavia to tell the Father all about his trouble. On hearing it, the latter arose like a lion and left at once for the Tibiti. On his arrival, he said Mass and then met the criminal.

" ' Where is that Indian woman? ' he asked without any preamble.

" The scoundrel, however, forestalling trouble, had concealed the woman in the forest.

" ' You must give her back to her husband,' said the priest authoritatively.

" ' I'll do nothing of the kind,' retorted the other brutally.

" Unable to discover the woman's hiding-place, but meeting her son, the Servant of God said: ' Speak to your mother and implore her to go back to your father.'

" It was all waste of time. Soon after, visiting the Tibiti again, the Father fell in with the unfaithful wife herself and entreated her to run away.

" ' I dare not,' she replied.

" Once more the priest called on the planter to release his prey, but the obstinate man exclaimed: ' Let her just try to escape, and I'll shoot her down.'

" This was going too far. Wounded in his love for Jesus Christ and for souls, the Father cast a withering glance on the villain and said: ' Listen: do you see that plantation of yours? Well, I tell you, it shall become a forest and you yourself shall fall into utter destitution and end your days in it.'

" The prophecy was fulfilled to the letter. Soon after, the planter saw his men leave him and his plantation become a waste. Then, abandoned by everybody, he ended his days in direst want."

Thus did the Servant of God become at times the instrument of God's justice; though more often his native goodness of heart was made the instrument of divine mercy, and this not rarely in wonderful ways.

One year the dry season had been exceedingly long, and the riverside residents on the Wayombo saw them-

selves at last short of drinkable water. Even the river water had become unfit for use, as the tide had mingled with it in an unusual way and turned it brackish. When passing that way on returning from one of his expeditions, Father Donders heard of the calamity and was much distressed. After tracing the sign of the cross in the sand with the end of his stick, he began to dig a little. Wonderful to relate, the water began at once to well up, and it was found, on being tasted, to be as fresh as though it had fallen from the clouds.

On another occasion, this same Wayombo—though some say it was the Commewijne—experienced the extraordinary power of the man of God. This river had at the time become the haunt of an enormous dugong, or sea-cow, whose presence constituted a serious menace to canoes and small craft. Several of these had collided with the monster and capsized, and six Indian children had recently perished in one of these accidents. One day, when Father Donders was passing that way, he was met by the inhabitants, who had come to tell him of their trouble and anxiety. The Servant of God just blessed the river, saying to the boatmen: "Do not fear, the monster has disappeared." As a matter of fact, it was never seen again in the locality.

Small wonder, then, if he reaped the reward of his assiduous and sympathetic charity in the esteem and love of everybody, or that he gained an extraordinary and unparalleled ascendency over those toilers, so as to get from them not only everything he asked, but even what he did not dream of asking. William Schoonhen, the witness with whom we are already acquainted, relates the following:

"Father Donders was loved here as a father. One day I happened to be at the *Caledonia* plantation when there was a great dearth of bananas. Now, as is well known, bananas are the staple article of food of the Negro. Suddenly I saw from my window a woman hurrying by. 'Where on earth are you off to?' I asked her. 'Don't you know,' she replied, 'that Father Donders is here? The good man cannot

take our ordinary food, as he has only one tooth left, so I am off as fast as I can to the *Concordia* plantation, where my sister lives; I know she has some bananas left, and I am going to ask for them for the Father.' Now, I can assure you, gentlemen, that when a woman was ready to run more than half a mile in our sun in the middle of the day, though streaming with perspiration, the Father must have been very dear to the people."

And thus did Father Donders, not satisfied with making himself all to all in Batavia to gain all to Jesus, still find time to preach Christ Crucified to the Indians, to the Negroes in the woods, and to the poor toilers on the plantations.

We must now follow the intrepid and untiring missionary on quite a new field.

CHAPTER XV

IN PARAMARIBO AND CORONIE

1883-1885

At the close of Chapter XI we stated that through the malice, ingratitude and obstinacy of a handful of individuals in Batavia, Father Donders was one day torn away from his beloved lepers and removed for a time from the sphere of his noblest and dearest activities. We have now to relate this painful episode.

Early in 1883, Bishop Schaap was making the canonical visitation in Batavia. His Lordship was never done rejoicing at the good wrought in souls by the missionaries, and expressing his edification at the wonderful life led by Father Donders. Suddenly a bolt from the blue threw the colony into confusion. The facts are these:

One day, in the January of this year, delegates from the leper settlement called on the Bishop and requested an interview. In their number was a certain Joseph, whose public misdeeds, together with those of his son, had called forth more than one sharp reprimand from the pulpit. They were received by the Bishop, but they displayed such nervousness in the manner in which they unburdened themselves as to be quite unintelligible. His Lordship, though thoroughly acquainted with their dialect, could not make out what they wanted. Father Donders was accordingly sent for. He, then, was the first to hear that the object of the delegation was nothing else than his own removal from the leper settlement. According to the delegates,

he was getting too old for his work; they no longer understood him in the pulpit; and so they asked the Bishop to provide a substitute. It is not hard to imagine how the sensitive heart of the man of God felt these allegations. But he never uttered a word and concealed his feelings from all. The Bishop, however, was indignant, and, determined to deal severely with them, said that he would comply with their request and remove Father Donders, but that—no matter how they might whine—he would not restore him to them, at any rate for many a long day.

The farewell words of the shepherd to his flock made a deep impression. "You see," he said, amongst other things, "we are under the Bishop's jurisdiction and must obey. However, though his Lordship is removing me from here, yet I promise you, in God's name, that I shall return to die in the midst of you. On the day of resurrection I shall be beside the lepers, that I may render an account of them before the face of the Lord."

And thus it came about that the apostle of Batavia, "the great and venerable Father Donders," as he was even then called, left his dear leper settlement, repudiated by a handful of scoundrels and deeply regretted by all the rest.

On the 7th February, 1883, he arrived in Paramaribo. Hitherto, at every unknown turning of the road, his faith had shown him the hand of God guiding him with a father's love; and he was not going to lose sight of it now. It was thus he notified his change six weeks later to his Provincial, Father Oomen:

"It has pleased God, Who orders all things perfectly, to remove me and make me live in community. Circumstances have induced his Lordship to look on this change as necessary. As Very Reverend Father Verbeek is ill in Coronie, Reverend Father Romme has gone to take his place. Moreover, on account of all our work here, his Lordship thought it well to send Reverend Father Van Vlokhoven to Batavia for a

time. Very Reverend Father, how I love community life! And then, we have so much to do! Knowing his Lordship's mind on the matter, I requested him, should he think well of it and should such be the good pleasure of God, to attach me to the community, and he was very pleased to do so.

"At the same time, if God arranges otherwise, I am always ready to go anywhere or to live in any place Your Reverence or his Lordship may be pleased to send me. I am six weeks here now, but we are so busy that I have not yet been able to visit either the Indians or my plantations. I hope to do so after Easter.

"*O quam bonum et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum!* Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! I am experiencing the truth of these words, and I am thankful to God for having so arranged it.

"I pray for you every day, Very Reverend Father; I beg of you to remember me also, that I may become a true Redemptorist and persevere in my vocation, for I value it above everything."

Thus wrote this true son of St. Alphonsus in his seventy-fifth year. What faith and humility! What simplicity and obedience! What love for his Congregation and for souls!

Father Donders remained attached to the Paramaribo community from the beginning of February to the beginning of November. Bishop Schaap writes as follows to Father Lemmens concerning his labours during that period: "Father Donders is back in town again; he is working like a young man and is bringing many souls to God." [1]

Father Van Coll, his Superior at the time, pays him a similar tribute. "Never," he writes, "during his whole stay amongst us, did I notice anything blame-

[1] Father Lemmens was a native of Utrecht. From a lieutenant in Surinam, he became a Redemptorist and died of leprosy, after many years of an active and fruitful apostolate.

worthy in his conduct. He visited the sick, worked hard to reclaim the careless, and devoted all his spare time to prayer. I never saw him praying otherwise than on his knees, with his body bowed low and without leaning against anything; occasionally he would just rest his hands on the *prie-dieu*. Whenever there were sick-calls to be attended to, Father Donders was the first to offer himself and would be off without a moment's delay. On one occasion, having forgotten to bring the Blessed Sacrament with me, I sent a message back to the presbytery for a Father to bring Our Lord at once. Father Donders was with me almost immediately."

The veneration and affection in which he was held by all classes—rich and poor alike—and which were so evident on the occasion of his former visits to Paramaribo, were again displayed. As soon as he was caught sight of, the news of his arrival spread like wildfire. "Father Donders is here! Father Donders is here!" was heard on all sides. Everyone who met him went straight up to greet him. "Every day," says Father Van Coll, "we were besieged by the poor and the crippled." The Servant of God spent all his spare time going through the remotest corners of the town, even during the hottest hours, not only giving alms, but speaking words of peace and consolation.

We get some idea, too, of the reputation for sanctity he enjoyed amongst the townspeople. A revenue officer, giving his reminiscences one day, said: "I was then about ten years of age. Every time my parents saw Father Donders, they would point him out to me, saying: 'Look, there is the holy priest passing.'" It had almost become a proverb in Paramaribo: Whoever speaks or thinks ill of Father Donders cannot be much. A certain civil functionary, and a Freemason to boot, records the following:

"One day there was a crowd of us together. One of our number, a great braggart, had been boring us to death with stories of quarrels he had with all kinds of folk, including his Superiors. Not believing half he said, we simply smiled. Then, warming up, the

FOREST AND STREAM

fellow began to describe a row he had with Father Donders. This was too much of a good thing, and the great humbug was greeted with roars of laughter."

Even the Government was anxious to give official recognition to his deserts. On the day his pension was being granted him, authorities gave expression to their gratitude for "the charitable attention he had bestowed on the sick in Batavia during so many years." Father Donders, however, in accepting, was careful to add: "I am not taking my pension that I may be able to pass my days in idleness and inaction. As long as it will please God to give me health and strength, I hope to work for souls, which have been bought at such a great price." The four last years of his life were to afford a striking confirmation of these noble words.

In spite of his venerable age and the general esteem in which he was held, this faithful imitator of Jesus Christ still sought after humiliations more than after honours. The latter he bore with resignation: the former were his delight. In this connexion, the following incident, related by Father Van Tooren, then residing in Paramaribo, is illuminating.

"The Father was on an expedition in the direction of the Para, and had prolonged his absence by several days. We concluded that his great age was the explanation. Now, at the next chapter of faults, Bishop Schaap thought well of inflicting a stinging humiliation on him. I can still see the old man on his knees, listening to the mortifying rebuke and showing by the look of joy on his countenance the satisfaction he experienced. Now, a few days later, it was proved that the holy man had acted quite constitutionally."

Five months after, in a letter to his Provincial, the Servant of God gives vent to his feelings on various subjects. Concerning the happiness he felt in his vocation, he says: "I am realizing more and more every day what a great happiness it is to be called to the Congregation and to live in community like brothers." About conformity to God's Will: "How

good God is to the soul that abandons itself entirely to Him and sees His divine Will in that of Superiors!" And again: "How consoling it is to think: I am doing what God wills!" About zeal for souls: "How wonderfully God arranges everything! From Him come all these desires to do a great deal for His glory and for the souls He has bought at so great a price. See how He gives me for this very purpose, not only health and strength, but also a wide field of action, in the town, on the plantations, and amongst the Indians."

The day he penned these lines—the 8th October, 1883—he little thought that his days in Paramaribo, which he found so delightful, divided as they were between the labours of the apostolate and the sweets of community life, were drawing to a close. Before a month was out he got orders to leave for Coronie and replace Father Stassen, who had just fallen ill. The stout-hearted old man set off on All Souls' Day, and the following day was at his post.

Coronie lies almost midway, on the Atlantic seaboard, between the River Surinam and the Corentyn. Though once a rich and fertile land, with its sugar and cotton plantations, its prosperity was already on the wane when Father Donders went to live there. One remnant of its bygone splendour was a magnificent highway, almost dazzling in its whiteness, running for many miles between a double row of superb cocoanut trees. When the Redemptorists landed in Guiana in 1867, the Catholic population of Coronie numbered but seven hundred and thirty souls, only twenty-seven of whom had made their First Communion. Since then, things had gone on steadily improving. In 1875, the communions had numbered more than three thousand, and the year Father Donders went there, the Catholics had risen to one thousand four hundred. At that date the colony could point to a flourishing confraternity of the Holy Family for both sexes, two spacious schools, and chapels of ease on the *Burnside* and *Welgelegen* plantations. On his arrival, the Servant of God found he had Father Romme for his Superior,

and wrote thus to his Provincial: "At last, the two fellow-novices have met again."

It would be a mistake to imagine that it cost him a great deal to renounce the delights of community life and, with his seventy-four years upon him, to enter an entirely new field of action. We have his own assurance for the contrary. Nor need we be surprised at this, as the same spirit of faith never ceased to animate and guide him.

"It has pleased the divine Goodness," he writes to his Provincial, "to remove me in order to make use of me in Coronie for the salvation of souls. There is no lack of work here either, and numerous are the sinners to be converted."

The older he grows the more he delights in a complete surrender of his soul into the hands of his Creator. "Oh," he exclaims, "what a comfort it is to be able to say: I am here to accomplish the Will of God! O holy Will of God!" And casting a grateful look on the source of his happiness, he goes on: "I cannot thank God enough for the grace He has given me in calling me to the Congregation."

Father Romme, his Superior and friend, delighted to have him, wrote soon after to the Provincial:

"The Bishop has sent us Very Reverend Father Donders. There is no need for me to tell you that by his indefatigable zeal, his constant prayer, his mortification, and his exact observance of the Rule, he is a source of great edification. Though in his seventy-fifth year, he still continues to go out almost every forenoon and afternoon in search of lost sheep. Not only does he never complain of being tired, but he shows no sign of being so after going about for two or three consecutive hours in tropical heat. May God bless his labours abundantly."

Father Romme's letter was dated the 20th December, 1883. Six days later, God Himself intervened and put an end to these labours for a time. On St. Stephen's Day, Father Donders took to his bed in a state of high

fever. At the patient's wish, the community made a novena to St. Joseph. There was no appreciable change during the novena, but the following night the fever abated and soon after, to the great joy of all, was gone. But his sufferings were not to end there. Three weeks had hardly passed when a dangerous ulcer appeared on the left knee. Painful incisions had to be made and a complete rest taken, which deprived him of the happiness of saying Mass for a fortnight. Hearing no word of complaint escape him, his brethren, deeply touched, remarked: "Is it not strange? We all know how anxious he is to resume his daily work of visiting the poor and the sick, and yet he does not even mention it." Thus did the man of God practise perfect abandonment to the divine Will and apply to himself the beautiful formula with which he used to announce any unpleasant news to his Provincial: "It has pleased the divine Goodness . . ."

No sooner had he recovered than the heroic old man set again to work. One afternoon, Father Romme said to him in fun: "Well, Father Donders, are you coming with me to *Welgelegen*?"

"Certainly," replied the old man, who had never yet visited that station.

"But 'tis a matter of about six miles, and we shall have to foot it there and back."

"Are you going yourself?" asked the Servant of God.

"Yes," replied the Superior.

"Then I'm going too," came the decided answer.

To come to the help of his confrères and share their hardships by visiting the outlying chapels, this old man of seventy-five actually wanted to learn to ride. But the Superior would not allow him, especially as the mount was given to shying and stumbling. One day, however, when the heavy rains had flooded the *Welgelegen* road and the only way to reach the chapel was on horseback, the man of God felt the same longing, and as he could not take his turn through not being able to ride, he was much put out. And so Father Romme never returned from this journey without being

A NEGRO HOME

asked by Father Donders: "And has not the water gone down yet, Reverend Father? When shall I be able even to drive there?"

Not indeed that he had to go far afield to find souls to save. In the town itself there were many who, in spite of all the missionaries could do, wallowed in vice and would not leave it. He had scarcely recovered when he multiplied his visits and exhortations to penance. No rebuffs disheartened him. One day he had just warned a woman who had long been living in forgetfulness of her duty. As he was making his way back to the presbytery without having gained anything, he remarked to Sophia Jansen, who kept a lodging-house in Coronie: "What am I to do? Am I to return to her? She will say: 'Here is that troublesome old fellow back again.' It does not matter, I'll go back to-morrow." Speaking generally, such persistence won through, even in the most obstinate cases. An old woman of sixty, after having long imitated Magdalene by her disorders, imitated her at last in her penance, as a result of Father Donders' entreaties. For two months, she went on foot every morning from her house to the church—an hour's walk—in order to be there at six. After this severe trial he admitted her to her First Communion. He had every reason to be satisfied, as she passed the remainder of her days in holiness and regularity.

A certain European, who had made his First Communion as a child but had since strayed far from God and was living in sin with an accomplice, no longer set foot in the church and rejected all advances on the part of the priests. One day, however, he happened to make the remark: "If ever I go to confession, it will be to Father Donders, for he is a saint." The old man heard of it. It meant a long and weary journey. It did not matter. He appeared suddenly one day at the door of the sinner's house. "Here I am," he exclaimed as he entered, "you asked for me, did you not?"

"Never," replied the man, "and I am in no need of anybody."

"Come now, my dear man," the Father went on, "here I am expressly to see you. Surely these old legs of mine have not carried me all that distance for nothing."

"No matter, Father, I repeat, I don't need your services," came the rejoinder.

"You don't need my services?" said the priest as he cast a searching glance on the obstinate sinner. He then put before him the shame and the dreadful danger of leading a criminal life so long. The poor man retorted by enumerating all the obstacles that stood in the way of his conversion. Father Donders returned to the charge with the utmost gentleness and charity and promised to call back soon again. There was no resisting burning and unselfish zeal like this. The hardened sinner yielded at last. Every evening he went to the presbytery for instruction. Thus prepared, he made a good confession and was then lawfully married. The woman herself returned to the path of duty. For many years after Father Donders' death, this man continued to approach the Holy Table frequently.

Three families—parents and children alike—were living in the most shameful disorders. For two whole years Father Donders visited them almost daily, though he daily met with nothing but refusals or empty promises. Now, a short time before leaving Coronie, he had the happiness of seeing one of these families converted. The two others followed suit after his departure, and attributed their conversion to his constant prayers. To his prayers, indeed, and also to his humility and heroic mortification.

"I remember," said Brother Nicasius, "how on one occasion we congratulated the Father on the conversion of a sinner in Coronie. Beaming all over, he replied: 'It is all for God, it is all for God. Let us pray, let us pray.'"

His days in Coronie were what they had been in Batavia—days of prayer, penance and work. We here give his daily programme as detailed by Brother Anthony, who lived with him for two years, went

through all the common acts with him, and accompanied him on his rounds.

"I remember everything," says the Brother, "as clearly as if it had happened yesterday. As I watched him closely, I know for a fact that the Servant of God never departed from his order of the day. He was the first in the church every morning. He always made his meditation on his knees and with his hands joined; I never saw him sit down. During meditation, while the rest of us were busy driving off the mosquitoes, he remained motionless as a statue. Sometimes we would say to him: 'But do you not mind them, Father?'—'Not in the least,' he would reply. 'There is one just now on your face,' I said one day. He then brushed it off with his hand. But as soon as we ceased calling his attention to them, he allowed these little creatures to torment him. Furthermore, as if the manifold discomforts arising from the climate were not enough for him, he resorted to all kinds of devices to inflict pain.

"He said Holy Mass with great devotion, but without slowness. After his thanksgiving, which he would often prolong, he took a very frugal breakfast: three times a week just a little coffee; on the other days he added a slice of bread. He then said some of his Hours, after which he went off in quest of souls. He came home at half-past eleven and went straight to the church, where he remained in prayer until twelve. It was only then he sat down to table. He rarely took meat, and very little even then. From half-past one to two, he took a siesta, after which he spent an hour in the church. From three to four, in accordance with the prescription of the Rule, he made spiritual reading and meditation, which was followed by half an hour's visit to the Blessed Sacrament. At five he was off again on his rounds. He was back at six, and the next moment found him again before the Tabernacle. At half-past six came the evening meditation, followed by a catechetical instruction in the church, which was not over until eight. Then followed a frugal supper consisting usually of a cup of tea and a cut of bread.

I never saw him take the slightest thing, even water, out of meals, of his own accord, and, except on rare occasions, he could never be induced to do so. At ten o'clock, after giving himself a severe discipline, which he also took on rising, he retired to rest."

After Father Donders' death, Father Romme wrote to the Provincial: "I have sent his discipline to Bishop Schaap; it was furnished with sharp points and little nails and was all stained with blood."

Brother Anthony proceeds: "His nights were not long. At eleven he went off to pray before the Blessed Sacrament. At midnight he stole very softly back. About two in the morning—though I could not say he did this every morning—he returned to the church, and at last went definitely to his cell." Other witnesses state that during the night he used often to walk up and down outside in the cemetery. "And thus," the brother concludes, "the Father's days and nights were days and nights filled with God."

Perhaps it would not be too much to say that amongst all the Saints who united the active and contemplative lives, few could be found whose daily programme was more crowded.

His Sundays, far from bringing any easing off, often meant a substantial increase in his work. When, for instance, his companion happened to be ill or absent, he then had to say two Masses, and in circumstances that would have been trying even for a younger and a stronger man. In such cases Father Donders would leave for *Burnside* at six in the morning and drive about three and a half miles. After saying Mass and preaching there, he would go on to *Maryhope*, where at nine he would sing Mass and preach. Then followed infant baptisms, so that it would be noon before this old man of seventy-five could get a bite to eat. "Are you not tired?" they would sometimes ask him. "I'm used to it," he would reply with his pleasant smile. But his exhausted appearance told its tale.

Now, to the hardships inseparable from such a life, the generous apostle, as we have already seen, added

austerities of his own choosing. And these were neither few nor light. He did not consider that his years justified his dispensing himself from a single one of the macerations he had so heroically undertaken in the vigour of his manhood. Whatever wise restrictions Superiors had thought well to put upon his life of penance he endeavoured to have removed, though ever with complete submission to their ruling.

"I remember," says Brother Anthony, "that one day Bishop Schaap, who had come to give confirmation in Coronie, was not twenty-four hours in the house when Father Donders asked his leave to sleep on the floor again. It was granted. In the evening the Father called me, told me with a beaming countenance of the leave that had been given him, and then asked me to remove his mattress. I stared at him in amazement and then carried out his wishes without a word. He was seventy-three at the time."

The most painful of all his mortifications must have been the bites of mosquitoes. Coronie is infested with them. We ourselves have a lively remembrance of the countless swarms that bore down on us when we were travelling in that corner of the colony. To beat them off, neither smoking nor gesticulating was of any avail. Without any preliminary hum, these treacherous insects settled on us and drove their stings into our flesh, through our clothes, giving rise to a smarting pain that lasted a considerable time. Now it must be borne in mind that the Servant of God had made a resolution to do nothing to defend himself against these pests, and that thus he fell an easy prey, especially at night when these insects swarm and when he spent so many hours in holy vigils.

"It was only during meditation," says Father Romme, "when we used to walk up and down the church in order to keep them at a respectful distance, that the Father, not wishing to appear singular, did as the rest of us."

The generosity he displayed in making voluntary sacrifices he also showed, even at his advanced age, in

fulfilling all that the duties of his state and the Rule demanded of him.

He was particularly careful about the silence. "I never saw the Servant of God break the silence during the hours prescribed," Brother Anthony declares, "except when charity demanded it, or when he was spoken to; and even then he replied with a sign of the head or in a few words. He was always the same; at whatever moment of the day he was called upon, I never caught him showing the slightest sign of impatience. Invariably the words came: 'Very well.' He would have faced anything rather than come late to the common acts. One day, when he was hurrying back from his rounds for the evening meditation, a tropical shower burst upon the town. 'Father,' the people said, 'there is no going out in that. You would get wet to the skin.' The old man glanced at his watch, waited a few moments, glanced again, and then said: 'The time is up, I must be off or I shall be late.' He took his leave, opened the door and was gone. Now scarcely had he taken a few steps outside when the rain stopped as if by magic. 'You see,' remarked the people in the house, 'how God rewards his perfect obedience.'"

And thus he continued to endear himself to God and man, as his Superior, Father Romme, wrote to his Provincial on the 30th October, 1884:

"Last Monday we had a little domestic celebration in honour of our saintly Father Donders' seventy-fifth birthday. He is the same man of God as of old, overflowing with zeal. There is no hardship, no privation too great for him once there is question of God's glory or the salvation of his neighbour. One thing he feels —not being able to take his turn in going to *Burnside* and *Welgelegen* for want of a driver. Not a day passes without his going to see the sick and infirm in the neighbourhood. A truly beautiful example on the part of a man of seventy-five."

The hero of the occasion availed himself of this

anniversary to talk to his Provincial on the subject of his approaching death.

"I made my retreat, thank God, as if it were my last," he writes on the 29th October. "It is true that I am still strong and healthy; however, I have just celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary of my birth and my baptism. On the occasion, they wished me another twenty-five years, and, they say, it is not at all impossible that their wishes be realized. But I cannot forget Our Lord's warning: *Estote parati, be ye ready*, which He addressed to everybody. God's Will be done. May His holy and adorable Will be accomplished in all things. May God only grant me the grace to persevere in His holy love and in my holy vocation.

"This year we have had a fair number of marriages, mostly of people living in concubinage for a long time. Others will follow. *Deo gratias et Mariæ.*"

"I continue to enjoy good health and to follow the life of the community," he had written to Father Anthony shortly before; "still I am an old man—I am about seventy-five—and my death cannot be far distant. I hope, then, that Your Reverence will please pray for me that I may die a good death."

Revered by his confrères, venerated by the people as a saint, and regarded by all as a finished model of priestly and religious virtue, Father Donders went about Coronie doing good for more than two and a half years. The numerous conversions he wrought had so endeared that station to him that, according to a witness already cited, he would have liked to die there. But God had arranged otherwise.

On the 9th November, 1885, Bishop Schaap told him to return to Batavia and replace Father Van Coll, who was going home to Holland. On receiving this injunction, the old man remarked confidentially to Brother Anthony: "I had hoped to end my days here." Then, checking himself at once, he added, joining his hands: "May the holy Will of God be done."

On the 17th of the same month he left Paramaribo for the melancholy abode of the lepers. Great was the distress of the people at his going, and great the grief of his confrères. Abandoning himself entirely into the hands of the Lord, he wrote to his Provincial: "God wills it; may His holy Will be done."

CHAPTER XVI

LAST LABOURS AND SUFFERINGS

1885-1887

It was in Batavia that Father Donders had given to Jesus Christ, in the person of His suffering members, the best of his health and strength; and it was in Batavia that he was to consummate his sacrifice and spend, in the service of his beloved lepers, his extenuated frame and the waning energies of his heroic soul.

His arrival was the signal for an outburst of joy. "I cannot describe," wrote Brother Wilfrid, who was present at the scene, "the affection the people displayed at seeing him again. I, too, was delighted to have such a saintly Superior as Father Donders."—"The moment we heard he had come," a leper woman relates, "we rushed in a body to the shore and, falling on our knees, asked his blessing."—"The whole parish," adds Gisbert Rups, "paid him the honours usually reserved for the Bishop, and escorted him to the church to the singing of joyous hymns."

Father Donders himself, though bent with years and hardships, was the same brave soul as of old, resolved to refuse no sacrifice to God. The same spirit of faith in divine Providence that lit up the ways of his youth shone bright upon the steps of his declining days. "Your Reverence will have long since heard that I am back again in Batavia," he wrote to his Provincial. "God has willed it so; may His holy Will be done."

On his return he revived the short sermon on the Blessed Virgin on Saturdays, which had been done away with by his predecessor on account of the small number present. He also at once resumed his life of sacrifice for God and souls, of utter forgetfulness of self and close intercourse with heaven.

But few details concerning the last months of his life have come down to us. Apart from the report drawn up towards the end of January, 1887, by Father Bossers on the general state of the mission, the only other sources of information we possess are a few letters written to his Provincial.

The only assistant the Servant of God had was Father John Bakker, who began by being a lay-brother, then became a priest, contracted the horrible disease, and thus could be of little help. Brother Wilfrid looked after the house.

Let us come to the report. Dry as its statistics are, they are valuable, as they show in its true light the vineyard that was the last to be watered by the sweat of his brow. Here is the conspectus for the year 1886—the year before Father Donders' death—drawn up by Father Bossers:

"The Catholic population in Batavia for this year was as follows: 100 communicants, 4 not yet admitted to First Communion, 5 who publicly refused to make their Easter duty, and 24 children. There were 3 infant and 5 adult baptisms; 1 of these children was illegitimate. There were 9 deaths: of these, 6 adults were anointed, 1 was a child from Batavia, 1 adult from Fishers' Camp who was anointed, and 1 Indian from the Calebasse River. In the course of the year there were 994 communions, amongst them 4 First Communions. The Holy Family Confraternity numbered 26 men and 40 women; the Living Rosary, divided into three sections, numbered 45 members."

To realize the enormous work got through by this indefatigable old man of nearly eighty, we must add to the foregoing list the daily catechetical instruction, the daily visiting and, lastly, the religious instruction

given regularly to the pagans and heretics who were anxious to be converted.

Nor was this all, as Father Donders was far from restricting himself to parochial work. The Indians and Negroes continued to exercise an extraordinary influence over his apostolic soul, and most earnestly did he appeal to Superiors for leave to go and see them again. The Negroes, who had taken up their abode at a distance from the leper settlement which meant a three-days' journey by boat, had at least two visits from him that year. A visit to the Indians meant a journey of seven or eight days in a boat. It mattered not: in the eyes of this heroic hunter of souls, neither distances nor dangers were ever a sufficient motive for flinching. Off he went, and a month before his blessed death he wrote: "Here I am back again in Batavia, safe and sound, after nineteen days' travelling. God be praised!"

The following reflections, then, inserted by Father Bossers in his obituary notice, are very just. "Zeal brought him to Surinam; for more than forty-four years zeal kept him in the service of the poorest, most neglected, and, moreover, most thankless people in that land. That zeal made of him an apostle bearing Jesus Crucified in his heart, whose one master-passion was to make his adorable Lord known and loved. That zeal burned with an intensity as great in the heart of the old man of seventy-five as it had been in the heart of the young missionary who had just landed half a century before. Or rather, we should say, it grew in intensity with his years. That zeal was tried, too, and purified in the crucible. To mention but two forms of suffering—the one occasioned by the amazing multiplicity of contradictions, privations and dangers encountered by the Servant of God in the course of his long and numerous journeys; the other arising from the poor results—seemingly poor, at any rate—of his many labours, both in Batavia and on the plantations, amongst the Negroes and amongst the Indians alike, especially amongst the Caribs. What the difficulties to be met with on such expeditions are precisely, and

what he deserves who fears not to face them, can be understood only by one who has become familiar with the conditions of missionary life in that land, either by his own personal experience or by a close study of them made on the spot. No wonder, then, that Catholics, Jews and Protestants—in a word, the whole population of Surinam—held the man of God in the highest esteem, and that they did so far less for any external qualities he possessed as for his kindness, his devotedness, and especially his unreserved sacrifice of self in the cause of the most needy and the most despised and the most afflicted people that exist."

It was in the midst of these unceasing labours that the last year of his life was passed. However, his yearning for God and Heaven became more and more apparent, and, in a letter written a month before his death, speaking of a blessed eternity, he exclaims: "Oh, when shall we enjoy that great, that immense happiness?" With his eyes fixed on the glorious crown our Holy Father Alphonsus saw prepared for those of his children who have remained faithful until death, he writes to his Provincial, six months before his own death: "How happy we are, Very Reverend Father, that it has pleased the merciful goodness of the Lord to call us out of this corrupt world to serve Him in the Congregation! Certainly we shall never be able to thank Him as we ought, for, if we persevere, we may hope to gain eternal blessedness, as our Father St. Alphonsus himself has done before us. God grant us holy perseverance. Let us never cease praying for it." His prayer was soon to be heard.

About the month of October, Father Donders had spoken to his confrère, Father John, of pains in the loins, and the latter had many times made anxious inquiries about his health. "I am well," the old man replied, "I am much better." On the 16th December, he wrote to his Provincial: "God be praised! I am still strong and healthy." And so he continued to be until New Year's Eve. He had again preached to his people that evening, and during recreation had made no allusion to his illness.

Now that very night, death, like God's angel of peace, appeared before him, telling him, through a sudden turn for the worse, that the moment was nigh when he was to go and behold his adorable Master.

On New Year's Day, 1887, Father John wrote to Bishop Schaap: "On this the first day of the year, it is my painful duty to inform you that Father Donders is seriously ill. He preached again last evening without showing signs of anything wrong. So much so, indeed, that had I not offered to do it for him, he had made up his mind to wish a happy New Year to his people himself. But I had scarcely gone to bed when he entered my room and told me he was in great pain. I need not tell your Lordship that I went at once for the doctor. The latter saw at a glance the seriousness of the case. He even thought he detected signs of senile decay in the patient. That evening, at six, much alarmed, he advised the sick man's removal to Paramaribo, if it were still feasible. For reasons which your Lordship will readily guess, I fully concurred with this suggestion."

On receiving this intelligence in the evening of the 2nd January, the Bishop told Father Odenhoven to go by boat to meet the patient as soon as possible next morning. Unfortunately, this Father, who was travelling at the time, was told at Caledonia that Father Donders was feeling a little better, and so he thought he could proceed on his way without calling at Batavia. Besides, Father Bakker had written as follows on the 2nd January:

"Contrary to our expectations, Father Donders' removal has not been found possible. The patient is much better, it is true, but the doctor is still of opinion that he is not equal to the journey. Nephritis is the trouble; the case is serious."

Unfortunately, this letter was delayed. When it came, Bishop Schaap sent Father de Kuyper with all speed to Batavia, together with a young doctor. Meanwhile, he wrote to the Provincial: "I think we must be prepared for the news that it has pleased Our

Lord to summon His most faithful Servant to his reward. What a blessed lot awaits that man ! "

In the night of the 5th and 6th January, Father Donders expressed his desire to receive the last sacraments. Father Bakker complied with his wishes at once. Then the dying man spoke as follows :

" I have nothing to dispose of, I have nothing to settle, I have nothing to say. They may bury me where they like. I desire two things only : first, that you ask pardon in my name of the people for any offence I may have given them ; secondly, that you let them know the great grief I feel at the bad lives several of them are leading, in spite of all my exhortations and of my desire that they should realize what an evil sin is."

It was his last will and testament. Father Bakker made it known to the people, in the midst of much emotion, during the High Mass next day, which was the feast of the Epiphany.

" From that moment," the same witness proceeds, " the Father scarcely spoke. No murmur escaped his lips. Contented with everything, he abandoned himself in his sufferings to the holy Will of God. He remained fully conscious and was thus able to occupy his thoughts with Jesus and the things of heaven to the very end."

One day, before the end came, he eagerly seized on an occasion that offered of doing his lepers a signal service. The medical officer in Batavia did not at all give to the discharge of his duties the attention one would expect from a member of his profession. He drank, often fell a victim to his nerves, was a Freemason, and but too frequently gave proof of the grossest neglect. And thus, when called to Father Donders, he merely wrote a prescription—and a useless one at that—and advised the patient's removal to the town. That was the last that was seen of him. In this extremity, Father Bakker applied to the assistant doctor, who, in view of the utter carelessness of his chief, though subordinate to him in everything, took the case in hand, and helped himself from the State

pharmacy. On reflection, however, Father Bakker began to entertain fears that the doctor might take offence and report his subordinate, and thus make things unpleasant for him with authorities. On the other hand, he did not forget how he and his predecessors, and Father Donders himself, had been long wishing for an end to be put to an intolerable situation. And so, taking the matter in hand himself, he drew up a report for the civil authorities, setting forth the necessity under which the assistant lay of attending the patient himself, and that at the express request of the latter, only when he had been abandoned by the medical officer and left without the requisite attention. Such a document, emanating from a missionary in his last agony, and from a man who, as everybody in the colony knew, had never sought his own interests or uttered a word of complaint against anyone, could not, to Father Bakker's thinking, but make an impression on authorities and induce them to remove the objectionable personage from Batavia. As soon as Father Bakker had completed his work, he went off, accompanied by the assistant doctor, to read it for his Superior, whom he then asked to sign it. Always prudent, the dying man wished to have it read to him again. He followed it with the closest attention, and only then did he attach his signature to the document. Thus, to his last breath, his fatherly solicitude for the lepers left nothing undone to secure for them, as far as in him lay, the relief which their distress called for.

Meanwhile, his illness was rapidly gaining ground. But the virtue of the man of God rose superior to everything. "I attended Father Donders to the very end," the assistant doctor stated on oath. "Concerning himself, the Servant of God was satisfied with everything and displayed indifference. These words were constantly on his lips: 'May the holy Will of God be done! May the holy Will of God be accomplished in me!' When asked if he were in pain, he would reply with a smile: 'No, no, not at all.' I never in my whole life attended a patient like him. I was still a Protestant at the time, and I said to myself:

Father Donders is the first, and will surely be the last, I shall ever see so perfectly resigned to the divine Will."

On the morning of the 12th January, the devoted assistant called to inquire how the patient had passed the night. "Very well," was the reply, "I have no reason to complain. I have but one request to make: bear with me just a little longer. I shall die on Friday about three o'clock." It was on Wednesday morning that he spoke thus.

"On Friday, at a quarter to three," the assistant relates, "I called to see the Father again. He was fully conscious and was praying in silence. Father John, too, was praying on his knees, and, I presume, was saying the prayers for the dying, though without a thought that the end was so near. Not to distract the two priests, I thought it better to withdraw. Had I foreseen that the patient would breathe his last so soon, I should certainly have remained. Now I had scarcely entered my house when I heard the knell ringing." It was half-past three.

"It was at that hour," Father Bossers afterwards wrote, "that the most zealous, most pious, most deserving and most exemplary old man gave back his beautiful soul into the hands of his heavenly Father. We all hope that he went to receive the crown of justice, if not at once, at least after a very short passage through the place of expiation."

An hour later a boat put in. Father de Kuyper and the house-surgeon of the military hospital in Paramaribo came ashore.

"They awaited us in silence on the shore," relates Father de Kuyper. "Father John approached and said: 'It is too late; Father Donders died an hour ago.' After having called at the church, we proceeded to the house where the body lay, and recited the *De Profundis*. The deceased, clad in his religious habit, lay on a mattress on the ground, looking quite peaceful. The people remained in the church that whole day and all the ensuing night, praying and singing

unceasingly. I entered the dead man's room in order to secure a relic, but, search as I could, I was unable to find the smallest object worth having, the few things I noticed were so old and worn. The lepers had already been before me and had laid hands on everything they fancied."

Next morning the mortal remains of Father Donders, clad in his Redemptorist garb, were laid out in the church, and throughout the whole day, especially during the funeral service, the poor lepers kept thronging round the bier, weeping and lamenting: "Oh, my good Father! my good Father is dead! Good Father! Good Father! Pray for us, pray for us!" In the vehemence of their grief they kept reproaching those who, a few years before, had complained of the Father to Bishop Schaap, and kept repeating bitterly: "'Tis your fault that our Father had to suffer so much. Yes, 'tis your fault that he had to leave Batavia." Even the guilty parties now showed the keenest sorrow for their past behaviour.

The burial took place in the afternoon about five. As the body was leaving the church, Doctor Groot remarked disconsolately: "It is all up with Batavia now." All the lepers who were still able to walk followed the remains to the cemetery. "Those who could no longer stand," a leper declared, "dragged themselves along on their knees."

After a few touching words from Father de Kuyper, Father Donders was laid to rest at the foot of that great cross beneath whose shadow he had so often gone by night to converse with God.

In his cathedral in Paramaribo, Bishop Schaap held a solemn funeral service, after having delivered, the previous evening, an oration which was a monument not only to his own eloquence, but also to the lofty virtues of the apostle of Jesus Christ. He then wrote as follows to the Provincial in Holland:

"Father Donders is with God. All my efforts to have the patient removed to the town failed. Father de Kuyper, whom I had sent to Batavia with one of

the best house-surgeons of the hospital, arrived an hour too late.

"I have not time just now to give you more precise details. I have sent a few simple notes to Father Van Coll, which he can utilize for an article for *De Volksmissionaris*,[1] as there can be no question of printing as it is what I communicated to him here. And yet if anyone ever deserved to be spoken about after his death, it is certainly Father Donders. The dear old soul!"

Before concluding this chapter let us see at a glance what was the outcome of those thirty odd years spent by the saintly missionary amongst the lepers, and of all the toil they entailed.

As for Father Donders himself, he became, in that land of unutterable distress, a man whose name is now before the ecclesiastical courts of the Eternal City as a candidate for the honours of the altar.

If we consider the hapless dwellers of Batavia, we repeat the words—which sum up all—of Father Van Coll, one of his biographers: "He so won all hearts that there was scarcely a single inhabitant of the leper settlement who left this world without the true Faith and the last sacraments; while many, and very many, were those who, through his zeal, learned to live a holy life and die a holy death."

[1] *De Volksmissionaris*: the People's Missioner—a monthly review published by the Redemptorist Fathers of the Dutch Province.

CHAPTER XVII

DAWNING GLORY

FATHER DONDERS is no longer amongst us. Assisted by a single confrère, Father Bakker, himself a leper, he gave back his beautiful soul to God in that leper settlement of Batavia which is an object of horror for most of those who know it. He now reposes in the shadow of that great cross at whose foot he spent so many hours of the day and the night in prayer.

And now the dawn of glory is already breaking over his unpretentious grave. What a striking contrast between the past and the present! Seventy years ago the neighbours cast pitying glances on the poor weaver's son cutting the grass by the wayside that he might come to the relief of his parents in some small way. To-day we are called upon to listen to Bishop Schaap, the Vicar Apostolic of Surinam, delivering to an overflowing audience, in his cathedral of Paramaribo, the funeral oration of his spiritual son, which, for loftiness of thought and splendour of diction, recalls the eloquence that gathered round his pulpit in Amsterdam Holland's most distinguished men in the world of letters. Now his holy death is heralded and extolled not only in his own country, but in every spot in the wide world where a Redemptorist is to be found; and his confrères gather piously together the scattered details of his noble life that they may serve to edify generations to come.

The dead man soon began to be talked about. Two months had scarcely gone by since the apostle of the lepers had left this world when Father Bossers, the man whose circumstances best qualified him for a close study of his life, wrote as follows:

"In his lifetime he was the object of universal admiration for his heroic virtue, and was called 'the holy Father Donders' by his fellow-labourers. No wonder, then, that public opinion extols his memory and already assigns him a special place amongst the sons of Alphonsus who surround the throne of their blessed Father in heaven and sing the divine mercies eternally."

In his native Holland, whoever—be he priest or layman—has had the privilege of knowing him proclaims him blessed and feels urged rather to implore his intercession than to pray for the repose of his soul.

Schoolfellows who are still living recall with emotion his exceptionally virtuous youth, and one amongst them, on hearing of his death, wrote these lines, which express the deep conviction of them all.

"Father Donders is dead. Not one amongst the schoolboys and seminarists who lived with him but will agree in declaring that earth numbers one just man the less and heaven a saint the more. And should there one day be question of his canonization, not a voice will be raised against it. Far from creating surprise, such will be the universal desire."

The Dutch and colonial press joined enthusiastically in this concert of praise, so that the renown of the holy priest daily grows. Many go to him with confidence in their troubles, and do not go in vain. Father Van Grinsven, a confrère of Father Donders, published, with the permission of the Congregation of Rites, a novena of prayers, and the edition of ten thousand copies was quickly exhausted. With the same authorization, fifteen thousand copies of a collection of favours received soon followed. A biographical sketch, from the same pen and warmly recommended by the Dutch Hierarchy, is at present in the hands of more than twenty-five thousand delighted readers.

And this chorus has been growing in strength. Knappert, a Protestant Professor of the University of

TOMB OF FATHER DONDERS IN CATHEDRAL OF PARAMARIBO

Leyden, holds up Father Donders as the ideal of holiness in the Catholic Church and a model for his age and country. Professor Gerard Brom, drawing a parallel between the saintly missionary and his countryman and namesake, an oculist of renown from the same town of Tilburg, says: "Which of the two men is the greater? Nobody who has a spark of Christian faith can hesitate for a moment. *We* certainly vote for the saint. The scholar, looked at in the light of eternity, is nobody beside him." Professor Geurts, who once so ably sketched the Servant of God in the columns of *De Tijd*, of which he was editor, contributes a psychological study of the greatest interest. Finally, there is the testimony of Cardinal Van Rossum, the Prefect of Propaganda: "It was," he says, "by the faithful discharge of all his duties that the Venerable Father Donders became a saint. To everyone, whatever be his position in life, he points out the sure path to perfection, nay, even to the very pinnacle of virtue."

Already the glory of the apostle of the lepers and the Indians is beginning to send its rays across the frontiers of Holland. Short biographical sketches, articles in French, English, German, Spanish, and Portuguese reviews, are winning for him an ever-growing renown both in Europe and America. Religious art, too, has been busy popularizing the expressive features of the man of God, and these may be already seen in fresco and stained glass in many a church and chapel in his native land.

As a result of a public meeting in Tilburg, a committee was formed, in November, 1921, for the erection of a monument to his memory on one of the most picturesque spots of the Brabantine city.[1]

Likewise in Tilburg, a burse was founded for apostolic students. In Roermond, a mission fund was instituted. In this same manufacturing town, a Catholic

[1] In the great Missionary Exhibition which was solemnly opened by Pius XI, in the Vatican Gardens, on December 21st, 1924, a large painting could be seen representing the Servant of God dressing the lepers' sores.—Tr.

guild, founded for the development of the weaving industry, has been placed under the protection of the lowly weaver's son. The mission preached in Tilburg in 1923 was placed under his patronage. In the same town an elementary school for young girls is proud to bear his name. In Bois le Duc, a "Peter Donders" mission work-room is in full swing. In the mission circle, whose principal patron is St. Francis Xavier, the seminarists of Haaren have taken Father Donders as their secondary patron. A *Peter Donders Mission Circle* has been established at The Hague. In De Heikant, the native parish of the Servant of God, a young men's society has been placed under his protection. The pilgrimage sent by this parish to Our Lady of Montaigu, in 1923, was given as its chief intention in prayer the beatification and canonization of the Venerable Peter Donders.

Special honours have been bestowed on the holy missionary in those places which he has made illustrious by his virtues. As we have seen, his home was pulled down in 1835, and the ground on which it stood, together with the garden in which Peter had built his little clay chapel, passed into other hands. Indeed there remained nothing but a little plot, the well and a heap of rubbish buried in the earth. Fortunately, through the painstaking researches of Father Luyckx, C.SS.R., who was once a missionary in Surinam, the exact site of the old house and garden was located. This property was acquired by the Fathers of the Dutch Province, and was thus definitely rescued from the risk of being put to unworthy uses.

According as the story of the wonderful deeds of the Servant of God became noised abroad, the faithful wended their way in ever-increasing crowds to the hallowed spot in order to pray there. Amongst them were some who, after drinking from the well from which Father Donders had often drawn water as a child and a youth, declared that this act of devotion, accompanied by a fervent prayer, had obtained precious graces for them. As this became known, the sick and infirm hastened thither full of trust. Little by little,

not individuals alone, but whole multitudes could be seen making for the birthplace of Peter Donders. The parish of De Heikant led the way. On Easter Monday, the 21st April, 1924, it sent the first organized pilgrimage consisting of several thousand people. A month later, the Holy Family Confraternity of North Tilburg, four thousand strong, were on the move, to be followed, four months later, by those of South Tilburg, several thousand strong. On Ascension Day of that same year, 1924, a body of eight hundred men and boys of the Holy Family left the Redemptorist church in Bois le Duc to the singing of hymns and the recitation of the Rosary, and wended its way to De Heikant. Lastly, on the 27th October, the anniversary of Father Donders' birth, the Professors and Students of the Seminary of Bois le Duc went in a body to the same place. All—professors, theologians, philosophers—were animated by the same feelings of veneration for him who, either as a classmate or a pupil of their predecessors, had become the brightest and truest ornament of their house and seemed likely to become the special patron of future generations of clerics in the diocese.

The notable influx of pilgrims induced the priest of the parish of Mary Immaculate, in whose territory the ground lies, to build a little chapel of ease in the neighbourhood and dedicate it to the Most Holy Trinity. It proved a much-appreciated boon in bad weather. In the centre of the ground, which has been neatly walled in, a slab recalls to the passers-by that on this spot the Venerable Servant of God first saw the light. Over the portico of the chapel dedicated to Our Lady, of which we spoke in an early chapter, is to be seen the following inscription:

IN DEZE MARIAKAPEL
KWAM IN ZIJN JEUGD
DE EERBIEDWAARDIGE PETRUS DONDERS
DIKWILS URENLANG BIDDEN[1]

[1] *In this chapel dedicated to Mary, the Venerable Peter Donders, when a young man, often spent long hours in prayer.*

The door of the room once occupied by him in the Theological Seminary of Haaren bears this strikingly concise inscription:

VEN. DEI SERVUS
PETRUS DONDERS
1839-1842

In this room, besides a relic consisting of a fragment of bone, are a few portraits and four *prie-dieux*, and we were told by the President himself that here the seminarists, as well as the diocesan clergy during their annual retreat, love to ponder and to pray.

Let us now turn our eyes towards Surinam, that distant land which, for forty-five years, was the scene of our hero's apostolic life. How did it fare since he left it?

Urged by gratitude and affection, the inhabitants of the leper settlement loved to visit his grave and pray there, recalling all he had done for them.

But Batavia was doomed to go. More than once Father Donders himself had clearly said as much, and his words came true. Bishop Wulfingh had founded the excellent *St. Gerard Majella Home* for the Catholic lepers; the Moravian Brothers and other Protestants had built the *Bethesda Home* for their co-religionists; and the Government, on its part, had undertaken to provide board and lodging for the rest at Châtillon, when one day almost the entire settlement—church, houses, huts—fell a prey to the flames.[1] The cross

[1] In the three above-mentioned institutions there are at present about four hundred lepers, while about as many more unregistered sufferers are living in their own homes. The Catholic *Saint Gerard Majella Home* is in charge of the Tilburg Sisters and provides for one hundred and seventy lepers. A Redemptorist chaplain not only has spiritual charge of the establishment, but also has much to do with the temporal welfare of its inmates. We may mention here that the Redemptorist Fathers—thirty in number—are the only priests in the Colony, and have entire charge of it. Their activities are divided between the demands of their parishes and the conversion of the pagan population. There are teaching Brothers for the schools.—Tr.

ST. GERARD MAJELLA HOME FOR LEPERS

alone—the great cemetery cross at whose foot the Servant of God had prayed so long—was saved, as it had been previously removed to Paramaribo. This calamity, however, was unable to efface the memory of the great apostle. It has clung imperishably to that land of woe.

Father Ahlbrinck writes: "To-day, whenever a missionary ascends the Coppename and its tributaries for the first time, in quest of Carib Indians, the boatmen never fail to point out the place where the old leper settlement once stood. 'Batavia!' they exclaim, 'there is where Father Donders lived.'—'Is that it?' comes the eager answer. And then the conversation usually drops; for it is not possible to express in words—nor indeed can it be easily imagined—what it must have been to live one's days on that lonely spot, in the midst of lepers, by the waters of a river whose banks no stranger ever treads."

The precious remains of Father Donders no longer rest there. At two o'clock in the morning of the 27th July, 1900, Fathers de Kuyper, Van Coll, Walle and Bazelmans, together with Brother Nicasius and the Chief Commissioner of Public Works, met round the tomb. Father de Kuyper, with a few who had been present at the funeral in 1887, pointed out without any hesitation the exact spot where the mortal remains of the man of God had been consigned to the grave. Five grave-diggers set to work at once and soon came upon the coffin and laid it bare. It was found well preserved, with the exception of the lid, which had been broken in. This was removed and the sacred remains lay open to view. The habit was practically intact; the rosary and small brass crucifix were slightly injured. All was reverentially laid in a cedar-wood coffin lined with silk, which was then sealed and secured with all the guarantees prescribed by the Church for such occasions. A few particles of bone were first removed to be distributed as relics. On the 28th July, the coffin, which had been sent on to Paramaribo, was solemnly laid by Bishop Wulfingh in the tomb prepared for its reception near the sacristy of the cathedral, above the

tomb of Bishop Grooff. There it remained for twenty years. On the 27th January, 1921, it was again removed, to be deposited with great pomp by Bishop Van Roosmalen, the Vicar Apostolic of Surinam, in a monument erected within the cathedral itself and facing St. Joseph's altar.

These manifestations of confidence and affection, while emanating from persons notable, in many instances, by their rank or merit, were still of a private nature. At the same time they served to give an impulse to demonstrations of a more official kind, which in turn gave fresh encouragement to the former.

At last the Church began to move in the matter. Fourteen years after his death, ecclesiastical authorities were aroused by the ever-increasing renown that had grown round this holy priest, and they began to consider the possibility of his one day being numbered amongst those whom the Church sets up for the veneration and the imitation of the great Christian family.

The Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, which, according to the very words of the Promoter of the Faith, " has the signal honour of having, within a brief space of time, raised up numerous apostolic men who, burning with zeal, have devoted themselves to spreading the glory of the holy Name of God," invited its Postulator General, Father Claudio Benedetti, to take the preliminary steps in the Roman courts to have the canonical process begun with a view to the beatification and canonization of its illustrious son, Father Peter Donders.

The Dutch Provincial, Father Peter Oomen, was the man who, amongst all others, displayed the greatest diligence. Even during the lifetime of Father Donders he had all the details that could be procured committed to writing. Father Startz, who spent a considerable time with the Servant of God in Batavia, wrote thus on the subject, in July, 1876:

" Your Reverence commissions me to note down carefully all I know of the manner of life of the

Reverend Father Donders. I will gladly do so. I only wish I were a saint myself, as nobody is better qualified than a saint to penetrate the mystery of a saint's private life."

As soon as Father Oomen received the news of the death of the great missionary, he sent the following word to Surinam: "Please put in writing all the details of his life. Send me also a piece of one of his habits." Kept as a precious souvenir, or rather as a relic, this scrap of clothing is still treasured with religious care.

The eagerness Father Oomen displayed in Guiana he displayed also in Holland. "As soon as I had returned from Surinam," wrote Father Beukers, "Father Oomen requested me most earnestly to go and visit Father Donders' contemporaries who were still living. I had to ask them all kinds of questions and commit the answers to writing, so that they might be made use of in the event of a canonical process. He then urged me to write the Father's life, and, as a matter of fact, I set to work at it, but was prevented by urgent business from seeing it through. He was, moreover, the principal witness in the diocesan process in Bois le Duc. He took part in fourteen sessions, if I mistake not, and prepared most conscientiously for them all."

On the 13th July, 1900, by order of Bishop Van de Ven, of Bois le Duc, the informative process was begun, the object of which is to gather information for the Congregation of Rites. It did not conclude until the 29th April, 1903.

By order of Bishop Wulfingh, the Vicar Apostolic, a similar process was instituted in Surinam and was opened, on the 9th November, 1900, with a pontifical High Mass. The first session was held in public and made a deep impression.

The hearing of witnesses on the occasion met with a rather unforeseen difficulty. Those simple folk who had known Father Donders felt rather scared before this tribunal. They could not be induced, especially, to open their lips on the subject of the wonderful

happenings and acts of heroic virtue they had noticed in the life of the Servant of God, and their fright was all the greater as they remembered well how he had expressly forbade them to say a word about these things. They even feared a chastisement from heaven were they to transgress his orders, and it was only with the greatest difficulty, particularly in the case of some, that their fears were allayed and that they were persuaded to speak.

Long ago, when Peter Donders was in the seminary as a servant-boy and student all in one, he had been given his fill of mockery and insult, with the alleged object of testing his virtue. Now, ecclesiastical dignitaries, sitting in judgment on him, submitted the virtues of the man of God to the severest investigation, this time to bring their heroicity into light. The number of witnesses cited before their tribunal was one hundred and twenty-seven, and their depositions filled a quarto volume of six hundred pages. So unanimous was the praise and so meagre the adverse criticism that the *Promotor Fidei* had nothing to urge against his virtues but immaterial objections, which the Postulators of the cause had little difficulty in disposing of.

From May, 1903, to the following August, the diocesan process *de non cultu*—so called because its purpose is to prove that the Servant of God had not been made the object of any unauthorized cult—took place in Bois le Duc. At last, in November of that same year, the acts of the whole Bois le Duc process were forwarded to the Congregation of Rites.

During the years that followed—1906, 1907, 1908—numerous petitions, chiefly from Holland, were addressed to the Holy See. The Dutch Hierarchy, the successive Vicars Apostolic in Surinam, the Heads of Religious Orders and Superiors of Religious Congregations, the Cathedral Chapters, the Presidents and Professors of the two Seminaries in Bois le Duc, the Catholic members of both Houses of Parliament, the Mayor and Corporation of Tilburg—in a word, the most influential Catholics in Holland, sent up petitions to Rome to secure the honours of the altar for their

great countryman. A foreign prince of the Church was also found to lend his weight in support of these appeals. In a letter addressed to the Pope, Cardinal Fischer, Archbishop of Cologne, thus wrote:

"For forty-five years Father Donders worked in an heroic and admirable manner for the salvation of the native population of Surinam. For thirty years he tended the lepers like a mother. To all this hard work he joined constant prayer, severe mortification and the perfect practice of the religious life. Countless are the souls he brought back to God, and all regard him as a saint."

On the 12th December, 1911, Father Donders' writings received the approbation of the Congregation of Rites. The following year fresh and pressing petitions emanating from Cardinals Van Rossum and Capecelatro—the latter, Archbishop of Capua—fourteen Italian bishops and Most Reverend Father Patrick Murray, Superior General of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, were addressed to the Sovereign Pontiff, urging on this remarkable cause. At last, on the 4th September, 1912, the petition for the introduction of the cause of beatification was laid before the Congregation of Rites; on the 10th February following, the Promoter of the Faith formulated his observations, to which the Advocates of the cause replied on the 10th March, and, on the 14th May, 1913, Pius X authorized the introduction of the apostolic process at Rome, with a view to raising Peter Donders—henceforth honoured with the title of Venerable—to the honours of the altar.

Begun in Bois le Duc in June, 1914, this new process lasted a year. Resumed in June, 1919, it was concluded in December of the same year, and the documents were forwarded to Rome in 1920. What the Congregation of Rites now requires before proceeding to the beatification of the Venerable Servant of God are two miracles juridically proved.

The spirit of faith and the piety of our readers can contribute much to hastening this happy event. The

following account of two graces obtained should awaken and strengthen this faith. We take them from the acts of the process; the first took place in Holland and the second in Surinam.

Sister Mary Teresa, an Ursuline nun of Grubbenvorst, related the following on oath to the court in session in Bois le Duc:

"Part of what I am about to state I witnessed myself, the rest I heard from the doctor. On the 29th November, 1901, Georgette Wiesman was attacked by irregular gout, which made her suffer much. In a few days the trouble reached the heart and brought about pericarditis. The young girl kept tossing restlessly in constant agony and spoke of nothing but of dying. On the 1st December, Doctor Receveur of Venlo did not conceal from us the seriousness of the case, and advised us to give her the last sacraments and inform her family. A few days later, the same doctor found her worse: an œdema, he said, was pressing against the heart and causing bronchial congestion. He reckoned that there were three pints and a half of fluid in the side. On the 13th December, he told the mother that the case was serious and that he could give no assurance, and, indeed, that he entertained but little hope. On the 16th December, Bishop Wulfingh, the Vicar Apostolic of Surinam, proposed making a novena in honour of Father Donders, and the community, together with the patient herself, began it on the 17th. Our Reverend Mother hung a relic of the Servant of God around the neck of the sick girl, who showed great confidence. From the first day the child no longer spoke of dying, although her temperature was still 104° and though she felt more prostrate towards evening. On the third or fourth day—I do not recall very well which—the doctor, finding that the quantity of fluid remained stationary, spoke of tapping at his next visit. Now, contrary to all expectations, so marked an improvement set in that on the last day of the novena I allowed the child to get up, at her own request, and the doctor, who had examined her the previous night, could not get over his amazement."

" Was there a tapping effected? " here asked one of the judges.

" Not at all," replied the Sister. Then, proceeding with her story, she continued: " The doctor said to me: ' I never could have thought that things would have turned out so well. Without any exaggeration, there were three pints and a half of serous fluid in the side; there is but a gramme and a half now, and the heart has regained its normal position.'

" We then began a second novena in honour of the Servant of God, which ended on the 3rd January. On the 13th of the same month, the doctor, who knew nothing about the prayers we were saying, remarked: ' I am not exaggerating when I tell you that never have I seen the fluid drop in a week to a gramme and a half and a definite cure ensue. For, even though I had effected a tapping, that would not mean she would be cured.' On hearing, then, that we had been making novenas, he said: ' Attribute it to anyone you choose; I certify, at any rate, that I never saw the like in the case of such a malady.' "

" But how do you know all that so exactly? " interposed a judge.

" I heard it from the doctor," the Sister replied.

" And was it exclusively in honour of Father Donders you made these novenas? "

" Yes, exclusively in his honour. The child's mother, it is true, had sent us Lourdes water, with a request to make a novena to Our Lady; but we deliberately did not touch the water and that novena was not made. On the first days of the first novena, the child took medicine; but it was not given her after that. Ever since, she enjoys good health."

Many cures have taken place in Surinam also, and many difficulties have been settled. We relate just one fact which, moreover, sheds fresh lustre on the well-known zeal of the Servant of God. Let us hear it from the lips of Sister Gerard, a professed Franciscan nun in Paramaribo:

" I knew a woman about eighty years of age," she says, " who, for nearly a quarter of a century, never

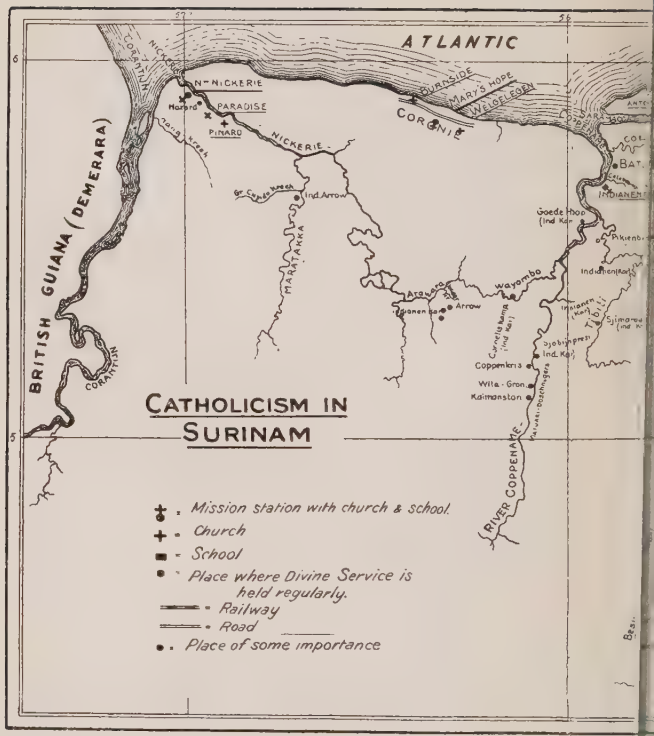
set foot in the church. Though ill and visited by a Father a few years ago, she turned her back on him and absolutely refused to be converted and go to her duties. Last year, hearing that novenas were being made to Father Donders, I resolved to begin one for the conversion of this unhappy woman, and each day, I said, with extended arms, six *Paters*, *Aves* and *Glorias* for this intention. Another Sister, to whom I had confided what I was doing, told me later on that, during the same period, she had said only one *Ave*. On the second day of my novena, I wrote to the old woman exhorting her to enter into herself; and now, as she told me afterwards, from the first day she felt an interior movement urging her to return to her duty. The following days I had no news. But on the day after the ninth, my mother came to see me and said: 'That woman was at Communion this morning and at confession during the week.'—'That's certainly remarkable,' I replied; 'I made a novena to Father Donders for that intention; so my prayer has been heard.' Now, ever since then, that is to say, for a whole year, that woman has been going regularly to her duties."

May Father Donders, then, soon receive those supreme honours which the Church reserves for her heroes, so that every Christian, on considering the humiliations with which the life of the holy man was filled in this world, and the glory that now crowns him in heaven, may exclaim with the Apostle:

O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are his judgments, and how unsearchable his ways! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and recompense shall be made him? For of him, and by him, and in him, are all things: to him be glory for ever, Amen.—Rom. xi. 33-36.

FINIS

NORTHUMBERLAND PRESS LIMITED, NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE


ATLANTIC
CORANTIJN
NICKERIE
N^T NICKERIE
Marand
PARADISE
PINARD
NICKERIE
CORONIE
DURASSIDE
MARY'S HOPE
WELGELEGEN
BRITISH GUIANA (DEMERARA)
CORANTIJN
Ind. Arrow
MARATAKKA
Goede Hoop
(Ind Kar.)
Indianen (Kar.)
Arrowa
Wayamba
Arrow
Coppename
Wita-Gron
Kalimanston
RIVER COPPENAME
CATHOLICISM IN
SURINAM
Mission station with church & school.
Church
School
Place where Divine Service is
held regularly.
Railway
Road
Place of some importance

MA

SURINAM
PARAMARIBO
COTTICA
RIVER
FRENCH - GUIANA
(CAYENNE)
RIVER MAROWIJNE
COMMEWIJNE
PHEDRA
MARIANENBURG
Albina
St Laurent
Likanau
Galibi
Kalbe
Ind Kar
Portorgoedor
Apatou
Valien
Boosnje
Bengenda
Knaskreek
Berlijn
Matta
Sebastien
Kondre
Amerikaan-kondre
Akoidie-kondre
Baaa-tabbetje
Lange-tabbetje
Paramaccaa negers
Boni negers
Armineval
Ind Arowak
Ind Kar
Ind Arowak
Ind Caribisch
Ind Arowak
Ind Arowak
Ind Arowak